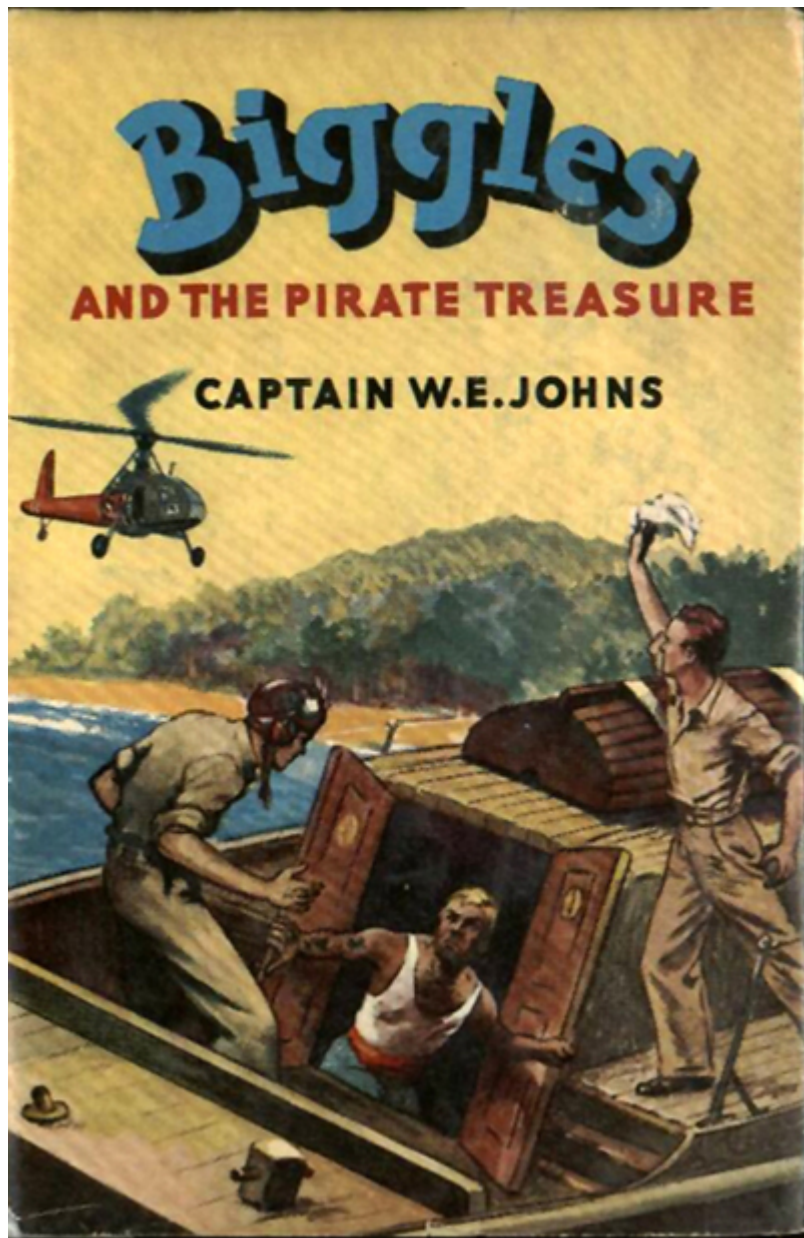


Biggles

AND THE PIRATE TREASURE

CAPTAIN W.E. JOHNS





BIGGLES AND THE PIRATE TREASURE

Air Detective-Inspector Bigglesworth and his staff at Special Air Section Operational headquarters were just going out to lunch when a dark, alert, dapper face appeared in the open doorway.

'Well, well. Look what the slipstream's blown in,' said Ginger

Hebblethwaite cheerfully.

'Hello, Marcel. What brings you here ? ' greeted Biggles.

Marcel Brissac, Biggles's opposite number in France, came into the room.

'Bonjour.

Bonjour mes amis,' he cried. 'How go you?'

'Oh, struggling along,' answered Biggles. 'We were just going out to tear a steak.'

'You know a good place to eat?'

'We do.'

'Bon. I come with you.'

'That's fine. But tell me. Are you here on pleasure or business? '

'On pleasure to see you before I go to business. Perhaps this time business will be a pleasure also. That is why I come to see you. Always I think of my friends. Alors! We have the pique-nique.'

'Where ? '

'In Madagascar.'

'That's a long way to go for a picnic. What's wrong with Richmond Park?'

Àh ! But there we do not find the box of gold.'

'What box of gold? I've heard of these boxes of gold before,' said Biggles sceptically.

'Certainly the gold is there. All we have to do is dig it up. You come with me. We make it a holiday. Everything is-what you say-laid on.'

'Before I make any rash promises I'd like to know a little more about this alleged parcel of bullion. You can tell us about it over lunch. Come on.'

At a quiet corner table in the restaurant where the Air Police usually had lunch Marcel told his story. Biggles listened with amusement; the others with delight, particularly as the first part was factual in substance, although, as Marcel himself admitted, the accounts of contemporary writers varied considerably in detail. He had studied them all, but relied chiefly on the narrative of Captain Charles Johnson, set down in his General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates, a small volume first published in 1724.

The gist of the story may be followed more easily in plain English than in the voluble mixture of French and English employed by Marcel when he got excited. As he approached the climax he fell more and more into his mother tongue, as was natural.

About two hundred and fifty years ago there lived one of the most unorthodox pirates of all time. A mild, good-natured man who disliked bloodshed, his name was Misson. Son of an old French family, he was given a good education, went to a military academy and was to have become a soldier.

But (like many boys before and since) he wanted to see the world, and at last prevailed upon his father to allow him to become a sailor. The ship he joined was a French man-o'-

war named Victoire.

On board, unfortunately for him, he came under the influence of a

renegade priest named Caroccioli, who had ambitious ideas for becoming rich quickly. To make a long story short Misson was persuaded by him to go on the 'grand account,' as piracy was called by those who practised it. The opportunity came when the captain of the Victoire was killed in an engagement with an English ship. Caroccioli made a speech to the crew as a result of which Misson took command, and hoisting the Jolly Roger sailed off to make his fortune.

For a time all went well. One of his first prizes was an English ship that yielded £70,000

in minted gold apart from other booty. From another ship he took

£200,000, and from a Portuguese vessel more than half a million. All this was in the Indian Ocean.

With his holds bulging with loot Misson followed the usual pirate practice of looking for a place ashore where the treasure could be hidden while he went out for more. The place chosen was a little bay at the northern tip of Madagascar, an island about which at that time little was known except that it was inhabited by savages. Here Misson spent three months, burying the treasure, careening his ship and building forts for the defence of the place should they be attacked by the savages. He called the place Libertia, or Libertata.

Putting to sea again who should he encounter but the notorious pirate, Captain Thomas Tew. Tew hailed from New York, then a British colony. As an honest sailor he had been commissioned by the Governor of Bermuda to attack a French fort on the coast of West Africa. Instead, he went

'on the account.' Learning of this King William III ordered one of his ships, the Adventure, under the command of 'our trusty and well-beloved Captain William Kidd' to hunt down Tew and destroy him. All the world knows how Kidd himself turned pirate and was subsequently hanged at Execution Dock. But Kidd has nothing to do with our tale.

Misson met Tew. They joined forces, and together took many valuable prizes, afterwards returning with their loot to Libertia. Now Tew had

always been against Misson's habit of allowing prisoners to go free. He believed in the old pirate motto 'dead men tell no tales.'

And, since we must stick to the truth, he was right. Two men whom Misson released (on a promise not to betray his hiding place on Madagascar) went straight to the Portuguese authorities, with the result that five men-o'-

war were soon on their way to Libertia.

Misson, Tew and Caroccioli, held them off for a time. But they realized that Libertia as a hiding place was finished, so leaving Caroccioli in charge they went off down the coast to look for a more secure retreat.

While they were away a cyclone struck Libertia and the place, as well as the ships (except two small galleys) was wrecked. To complete the ruin the camp was attacked by a horde of savages from the interior. Caroccioli was speared to death. Misson and Tew, abandoning a treasure estimated at not less than five million pounds, fought their way to the beach and escaped in the two galleys.

But their troubles were not over. Sailing in consort they were overtaken by another storm. Misson's ship went down with all hands. Tew carried on, took a few prizes, and then returned to his home in America where he settled down to a comfortable old age.

One account says he died there. But Captain Johnson, the contemporary writer, says no.

He states that some of Tew's old crew, having squandered their money, found him, and persuaded him to make one more trip. Or, what is more likely, suggested that they went to Madagascar to recover the treasure left there.

Be that as it may (for it doesn't affect our story) off the African coast they ran foul of a big ship belonging to the Great Mogul, and in the action that followed Tew was killed, being struck in the stomach by a cannon ball. The fact that such details are known supports Captain Johnson's declaration that Tew was killed at sea. It should be noted

that Tew's earlier adventures on Madagascar are known because he kept a record in his log-book, which was found after his death.

So much for the historical aspect of Marcel's story. That a vast treasure was buried in a cove at the northern end of Madagascar is certain. There is no record that it was ever recovered. We may also be sure that within a very short time the fast-growing tropical jungle would soon obliterate all signs of Libertia. At all events, the site has never been located.

Many years were to pass before the savages were subdued. Had they found the treasure, coins or valuable objects would almost certainly have been found in their possession by the French colonists who came later.

From nautical history Marcel jumped to modern events. Madagascar was, as he pointed out, a French colony, and any treasure found there (particularly as it was stolen gold) would automatically become the property of the French Government. In any case, Misson was a French citizen, even

if he was a pirate. There was now reason to suppose that someone, who also knew about the treasure, was well aware of this, and was trying to recover the gold by underhand methods.

Native rumours had reached the administrators in Tananarive, the capital, of a party of white men seen digging near the coast on the northern tip of the island. As there was no record of anyone having received official permission to do this - or, indeed, of anyone having applied for permission-the matter was investigated. This was not easy, for the island, the third largest in the world, lying two hundred and fifty miles from the African mainland, is nearly a thousand miles long and three hundred and sixty miles across at its widest part.

Nevertheless, the rumours were substantiated. The white men were found.

Surprised, they fled into the jungle - proof that they were doing wrong, and were aware of it. The French government, said Marcel, had no doubt whatever concerning the purpose of this party. They suspected that they had a private yacht, or a vessel of some sort,

handy, for they had not passed through the usual landing formalities. His government, went on Marcel, would not have taken a serious view of this unlawful behaviour -

feeling sure that the quest would end in failure - had it not been for one thing. A very remarkable thing, asserted Marcel, mysteriously, evidently determined to make the most of a dramatic climax. When the white men had bolted one of them had dropped a notebook.

An ordinary cheap little book. On the fly-leaf he had written his name.

So the name of at least one of these white men was known. There was good reason to suppose he was the leader.

Marcel looked from one to the other. 'Can you imagine what that name would be ? ' he whispered.

'I haven't a clue,' murmured Biggles.

'few!' cried Marcel. 'Thomas Tew ! '

There was a silence that lasted for half a minute. Then Biggles said:

'What a remarkable thing.'

Marcel, his face alive, turned on him. 'Remarkable! You ask me to think this is — what you say — coincidence ? '

'I didn't say that,' protested Biggles.

'Then why do you say remarkable? Is it not a most natural thing ? '

'You believe this man to be a descendant of the original Thomas Tew ? '

Marcel flung up his arms. 'But of course! What else? Ecoutez. Tew, this one who was a pirate, knows where his gold is hid. Perhaps he will forget. So he writes the place in a book; or perhaps on a piece of

paper.

Perhaps he makes a map. These things they pass from father to son for many years. Now here is one who looks carefully through all the old things. Perhaps he does not think of treasure, but it is droll to read through old papers. Then he finds the map. The word *Libertia*! He strikes his hand to his head. "

Voila!" he shouts. "The treasure of my great-great-grandfather. I am millionaire! I am Monte Cristo! But this Madagascar? She is big. She is far away. I have no money for a ship. If I go the French say what you do here, hein? They take my map, my papers. This will not do. I will find a man with a ship. I will show him my paper, and he will say bon, let us go and make ourselves rich men." Now these men are in Madagascar.'

There was another short silence. Biggles was smiling at Marcel's fervour.

'And what are you, personally, going to do about it ? ' he asked.

'I go to Madagascar,' declared Marcel. 'The government tell me, take an aeroplane and find these men. If you cannot find the men, find the ship.

Then we will seize it. So I get ready to go. Then I think hunting alone is not good. I will invite that old dog Beegles and will make a grand pique-nique

'That was a very nice thought,' agreed Biggles.

'You come?'

'If the Air-Commodore will give us time off.' Wagnifique. Ask him quickly. I am mad to find this gold.'

'But I thought your job was to find the men ? '

Marcel shrugged. 'What are men? We can find men any day. But gold -

no.

We find the gold. Perhaps we find the men as well. Then we have everything.'

Biggles got up. 'Just a minute. I'll see how the Air-Commodore feels about this.'

'If you come we fly down British Africa with no troubles,' explained Marcel.

Biggles looked at him reproachfully. 'I should have known there was a trick in it,' he said sadly. 'By the way, what's the idea of using an aircraft for this job? I mean, what about the ground forces? Couldn't they handle it ? '

'When you see Madagascar, my friend, you will understand. To walk about is not easy.

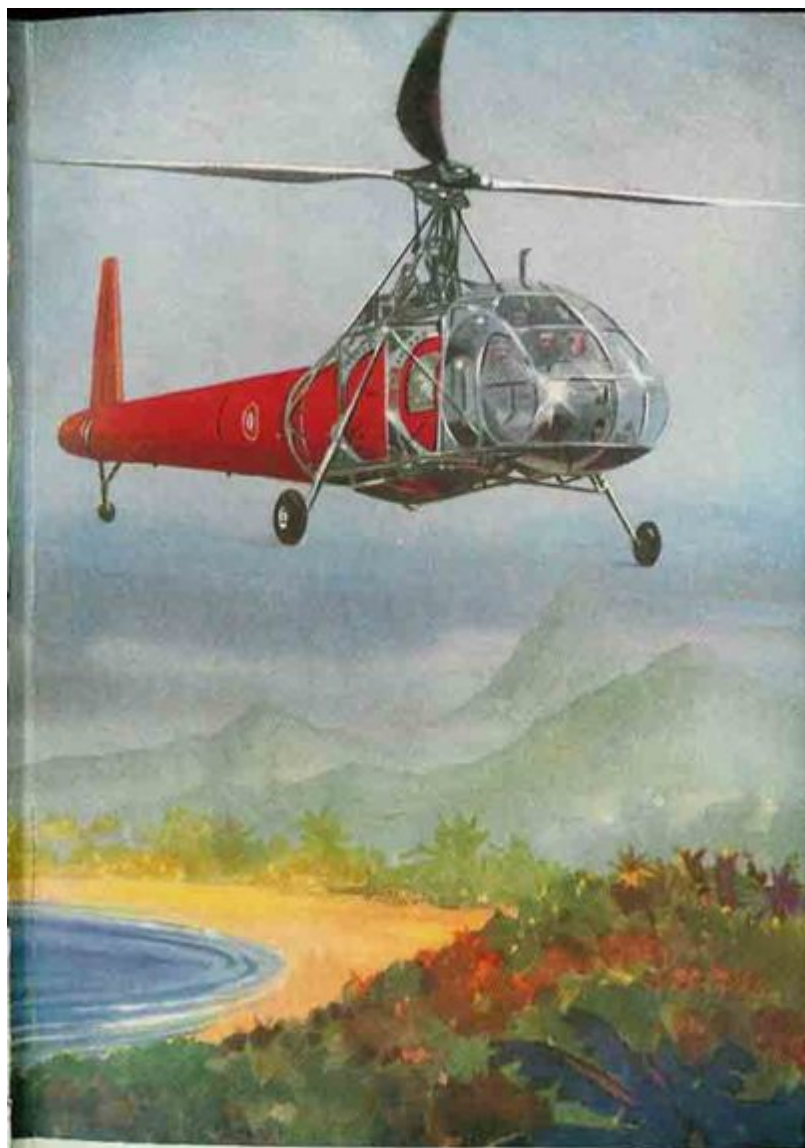
Also, it is slow, this jungle walking. You say go by a ship along the shore? That is no good either, because people hiding in the bushes see the ship before the people on the ship sees them. The aeroplane she is quick, and comes upon people suddenly. Looking down like a bird we see everything.'

Biggles smiled. 'I get it,' he said. 'I'll have a word with the Chief.'

A fortnight later, shortly after dawn, a French police six-seater helicopter buzzed its way slowly along the northern tip of the great African island. From it five pairs of eyes searched the beaches, the green jungle belt that fringed the foreshore, and the rugged massif behind it that rose to nearly five thousand feet. Far away to the south could just be seen the ten thousand foot peak of Tsaratanana.

To Ginger the scene was beginning to lose something of its novelty, for this procedure had been followed for three days, from dawn to dusk, without result. More than once he had recalled Marcel's remark

:Wait till you see Madagascar.' Well, now they had seen it, and if it had convinced him of anything it was that they were wasting their time. He could well



Five pairs of eyes searched the beaches (page 15)

understand why the pirates had chosen the place for a hide-out. It was apparent that an army, provided it did not light fires to make smoke, could conceal itself on this wild coast without much fear of detection.

And they were looking for a small party of men - half a dozen at most! He was not surprised that they had not found them.

Still, it was quite pleasant, this cruising along a tropic shore with the picturesque jungle on the one hand and a blue, island-studded ocean on the other.

Marcel had been right, too, in this respect. Surface vehicles would be useless for the work, for the simple reason there were no roads. Well, there was one, a comparatively short one, that French engineers had cut through virgin forest and frowning hills from Diego-Suarez, their base, to Ambilobe, where, confronted by a chaos of unsurveyed mountains, they had given up the battle with nature. Yet, curiously enough, there were several landing grounds for aircraft, mostly near the coast. They had chosen Diego-Suarez because the bay which it overlooked was believed to be the one often used by the pirates. Their fortified camp of Libertia could not therefore be far away, and it was reasonable to suppose that the treasure would be in the region.

The journey out had been uneventful. They had followed the main air route to Tanganyika and then flown across the Mozambique Channel, notorious for its dangerous seas, to their proposed base, passing on the way the delightful islands of the Comores Archipelago. Tananarive, the capital of the colony, they did not see, for it lay inland, far to the south.

After a day's rest they had begun their task, although this, so far, had turned out to be no more than a routine patrol. There was no further news of the alleged treasure-seekers.

Ginger realized that they, too, were faced with a difficult task. Even though they had a map, or directions for finding the hoard, they must have been appalled when they saw the country. Other treasure hunters have had this setback, for which reason, perhaps, few treasures-even the well-authenticated ones - have been recovered.

The weather, so far, had been fair; dry with cloudless skies, although they were approaching the season of the tremendous thunder storms which do so much damage to life and property on the island. It was, no doubt, one of these storms that had brought ruin to the pirate

colony of Libertia and so resulted in the treasure being lost.

Rounding Cap d'Ambre, the extreme northern tip of the island, Marcel, who was at the controls, turned south, still following the coast, and so brought a new panorama into view. To Ginger, if not the others, the alluring bays and beaches had a certain romantic glamour from the fact that some of the most celebrated pirates of all time must have known them intimately. It was also a fascinating thought that somewhere down there, under the sand or perhaps a spreading forest tree, there was a chest, possibly several chests, of gold coins of a dozen reigns.

Such a day as the one they now enjoyed, however, would not have suited the old-fashioned sailing ships, for not a breath of wind was stirring to ruffle a palm frond or the surface of the sea, which lay as fiat as the proverbial mill pond. Even the early morning mist still clung to the lower ground waiting for a breeze to disperse it. There was not a vessel of any sort in sight; not even a native canoe. But this, they had found, was usually the case. Only once had they seen a ship, a rusty tramp, ploughing a lonely furrow in a lonely ocean. The traffic lay nearer the African coast, two hundred miles or more to the west.

Marcel had said that only by air reconnaissance could the treasure-seekers be found; and that, the others had to agree, might be true; but an aircraft had its disadvantages. Chief of these was the noise it made, and this could not be prevented. By announcing its approach it would sound a warning to anyone below who did not wish to be seen; and there was no dearth of places for them to hide. They had merely to step into the deep jungle.

There was another disconcerting possibility. For all that was known the men might have found the treasure and departed with it. Even if they were still there they might not be on the mainland at all, but on one of the many islands. But supposing they were still there, one thing was certain.

If they saw the aircraft too often they would guess its purpose.

All these aspects of the case had of course been discussed more than once after darkness had put an end to the day's work. But there was no alternative.

As so often happens, it was just when interest was beginning to flag that something was seen to restore it - or at any rate provide them with an object on which to focus attention.

It was the wake of a vessel of some sort. There was no ship. Just a long narrow stain across the flat surface of the tranquil water, here and there meandering as it was made the sport of ocean currents.

As every traveller over a dead calm sea is aware, a ship in passing leaves its mark; and this mark, on a waveless sea, can last for days, stretching from one horizon to another almost like a road. In the case of ships driven by power the track will be marked in oil, for a single drop of oil, escaping perhaps from the propeller shaft, can spread to cover a wide area - as the reader may prove for himself by letting fall a drop of oil on a placid liquid surface. Thus are submarines betrayed. With larger vessels the trail is liberally besprinkled with garbage - tins, bottles, vegetable refuse and the like.

In the case of the trail that interested those in the aircraft it was no more than a faint smear of oil, showing that the vessel, whatever it might be, was equipped with an engine, although, of course, it might also have a sail. It appeared from the north-west, the direction of a compact group of islands, called by the French to whom they belong, the Isles Glorieuses. Across the deep blue sea it wandered to merge at last into the mist, or under the mist, that clung to a little almost landlocked cove. There was no village there; no human habitation; no clearing in the jungle; not even a semblance of a track; so the purpose of a craft in making such a landfall was at once open to suspicion. Moreover, the trail had recently been made, as was proved by the narrowness of its width at the point where it joined the coast. Farther out to sea it widened, and this proved that the ship had travelled towards the land; for the older the trail the wider it would become.

It was agreed unanimously that this would have to be investigated, so Marcel took the aircraft low over the spot where the trail died - or rather, as they saw presently, entered a miniature delta, cut in the earth by a mountain stream in time of flood. No sign of man, or camp, or ship, was to be seen. Marcel went so low as almost to brush the tree tops, but to no purpose. That a vessel of some sort was there was certain. Where was it? Why had it been at such pains to hide itself?

There was one answer, and an obvious one, to the last question.

Marcel took the helicopter along for three or four miles. Then, finding a bay with a broad sandy beach, he landed.

'We have them,' he declared. 'They are there. What other ship would have a reason to put in at such a place? Voila! We will find this ship. Then we ask the men what they do.'

Perhaps we find them digging up the treasure - for us. La la. Tres comique.'

The others agreed that the next step was to find the ship; which would, of course, mean travelling overland. But Biggles had a word to say about this. He pointed out that if the men had found the treasure they wouldn't be likely to hand it over without a word of protest; and even if they hadn't found it they would resist arrest, knowing that their map -

or whatever information they were working on - would be taken from them.

In plain English, violence was to be expected.

'We will approach quietly, like old cats,' declared Marcel. Tiens! This is France, and in France we have a way with foreigners who break our laws. They land without permission so they break the law. If they carry arms they break another law. Now let us go and catch them.'

Aside from anything the treasure hunters might do, the project of finding them, or even reaching the spot where they were thought to be, was not the simple matter that had generally been supposed. For the first time the airmen were travelling on foot through what hitherto had been seen only from the air; and, as they soon discovered, it was a different story

- a very different story - particularly as they were not properly equipped for jungle travel. Moreover, for the first time they were out in the heat of the day. With sweat pouring down their faces they struggled to force a passage along the coast.

An open glade gave them a respite, and here Ginger saw, for the first time, that remarkable tree, half way between a palm and a banana, known as the Traveller's Tree.

From a tall, palm-like trunk, springs a magnificent fan of fronds, giving the tree something of the appearance of a windmill. But the notable feature of the tree is its quality of yielding a supply of fresh cool water when the base of a leaf is pierced.

Having availed themselves of this refreshment the party pressed on, only to find the jungle so thick, and the going so difficult, as to make progress almost impossible. The hopelessness of looking for a treasure, or anything else for that matter, became apparent.

Biggles called a halt. 'This is no use,' he said. 'We shall be a week getting to the cove at this rate. I suggest we try nearer the sea. It will be farther, but the going may not be so impossible.' They had been trying to take a direct line.

This was agreed, and the party moved on again in the new direction.

Reaching the high water mark they had to contend with rocks instead of trees, although, to be sure, there was plenty of dead timber that had been thrown up by high seas. Moss made the rocks slippery, but, as Biggles said, they could at least see what they were doing and the atmosphere was not so exhausting as it had been in the dim, steamy jungle.

After a while the rocky foreshore gave way, to their great relief, to a small more or less open plain. From the way the surface had been split and cracked by the sun the area had obviously been a bog; but the mud had dried, and now offered a firm foothold. It was tiresome having to step over the cracks, but this was the easiest going they had struck so far.

There was a minute of excitement when excavations were observed ahead, for it was assumed, naturally, that this was the work of the treasure hunters. But Marcel, who knew a good deal about the island, soon damped their enthusiasm by pointing to pieces of material that

lay about. It looked like - and Ginger thought it was - coarse earthenware.

Marcel enlightened them. The supposed pottery was, he declared, pieces of eggshell.

This had been one of the nesting grounds of the giant prehistoric bird, the Aepyornis. The eggs, which had been preserved in the mud, were much in demand by museums, and some natives made a living by finding them. The method was to probe the soft ground with rods. When the rod encountered something hard, excavations followed. The broken eggshells lying about, asserted Marcel, proved that the digging was the work of native egg hunters, not treasure hunters.

Disappointed, they pressed on through more jungle - palms, bamboo, ebony and rubber trees being the most common. It was not so much the trees as the luxuriant undergrowth, mostly enormous ferns, that held them up.

Orchids abounded. There was an area where fruit trees suddenly appeared -

mangoes, tamarinds, bananas, lemons and bread-fruit; and from the fact that these trees were mostly of the same age, and seemed in definite sections, Biggles voiced the opinion that they might well have been planted by the pirates.

'In that case this must be their colony of Libertia,' said Algy.

'Why not? ' returned Biggles. 'We know it must have been in this region.'

At the finish they came upon their objective suddenly. Before them lay the cove.

Running into it, clearly defined where trees had been swept away by rainy season spates, were half a dozen streams. Actually, most of these were now dry water-courses. But the great object of interest was a small yacht, looking rather the worse for wear. Two things about it surprised them. The first was its position, for it was moored fore and

aft by cables flush against a face of rock, showing that the water there was deeper than might have been supposed. From the top of the rock the spreading branches of some bread-fruit trees overhung the vessel, throwing it into dappled shade. The second surprising feature was the fact that the yacht had been camouflaged in the familiar war-time brown and green pattern. Whether this paintwork was new, or a relic of the war, they had no means of knowing. But what with the natural and artificial camouflage they understood why the vessel had escaped their observation from the air. Indeed, close as they were, they might not have noticed it had it not been for the movement of men on the deck.

There were five of them, apparently the hands that worked the yacht, judging from their overalls. They were leaning on the rail, smoking, and appeared to be in earnest conversation.

On seeing the yacht, no more than seventy to eighty yards away, Marcel's party withdrew a short distance into the jungle to discuss the situation.

'Well, there it is,' said Biggles, looking at Marcel. 'What are you going to do about it ? '

'There are five of them,' said Marcel thoughtfully. 'Perhaps we could stalk them and seize the yacht.'

'Don't be too sure about the five,' warned Biggles. 'Those we can see are deck hands.'

What about the owners? They won't be far away. They might even be below, resting or having a meal. If it came to a rough house we might come off second best. There would almost certainly be casualties, and this is no place to get a bullet in your ribs.'

Marcel considered the matter.

Algy spoke. 'There's another difficulty you may not have noticed. How are you going to get on board without being seen? You couldn't swim to the ship without being spotted, that's certain. And if you tackled it

by land you'd have to jump down to the deck, and as that's a good twenty feet you'd be lucky not to break bones.'

'Yes,' agreed Biggles. 'I don't think there's any question of taking them by surprise. And that's no accident. These fellows know their presence on the island has been reported and, very sensibly, they've taken precautions.'

'Absolutely,' murmured Bertie. 'The blighters know the drill.'

'If I may make a suggestion,' put in Ginger. 'I think we ought to know a bit more about what's going on before we do anything. So far all we've done is guess. We don't know how many people there are on the yacht. Nor do we know what they're doing. We should look silly if we accidentally killed somebody and then found they were a bunch of professors looking for fossilized eggs. How about me doing a spot of reconnoitring? From the top of the cliff I could hear what those chaps were talking about. That should set our clock right.'

'I think that's a good idea,' agreed Biggles. 'How do you feel about it, Marcel? This is your show.'

Marcel confirmed Biggles's opinion, whereupon Ginger set off, to stumble almost at once over an object that was sticking out of the ground.

Rubbing his shin he looked at the thing, uprooted it and held it for the others to see. It was an old-fashioned flintlock musket.

'Pirate stuff, by Jove,' murmured Bertie. 'Jolly good souvenir.'

Biggles nodded. 'A man doesn't abandon his gun without good reason. I'd say this was the place where the savages attacked Libertia and Caroccioli got a spear in his neck.'

Considering what must have gone on here it would be surprising if the Jolly Roger boys didn't leave a few things behind. They went off in a hurry.'

Ginger grinned and walked on to make his reconnaissance, leaving the others to make themselves as comfortable as circumstances permitted. They were, in fact, far from comfortable. The stagnant heat was awful. Flies, mosquitoes and a variety of crawling insects, maintained a non-stop attack on every exposed part of the skin.

Groaned Bertie: 'I thought we'd been invited to a picnic.'

Marcel, mopping his face with a wet handkerchief, chuckled.

Ginger was away for an hour. When he returned, mud to the waist and his jacket in rags, one glance at his face showed the others that he was the bearer of important news.

'I've got the gen,' he reported breathlessly. 'They're our men all right.

The owners are away treasure hunting. Those fellows on deck are the crew, and they sound about ripe for mutiny.'

Biggles shook his head. 'The old, old story. There never were treasure hunters yet who didn't finish by falling out. What goes on, Ginger ? '

Ginger continued: 'As far as I can make out the men running the show

-
there are three of them - haven't said a word to the crew about what they're doing; but somehow or other the crew have found out, and they're pretty browned off about it. The line they are arguing on is something like this. If the treasure is found they won't see the colour of it.

But should the French come along and arrest them they'll go to gaol. They take the view that if it had been intended to give them a share of the treasure they would have been told about it, and asked to help with the digging.'

'They might be right, at that,' interposed Algy.

'What nationality are these fellows ? ' asked Biggles.

'They talk like Americans,' answered Ginger. 'You can imagine the attitude they're taking,' he went on. 'They say that as there are five of them and only three of their bosses, what's to prevent them from seizing the yacht and keeping the treasure - all of it -

for themselves.'

'Having knocked the owners on the head.'

'Presumably.'

'Treasure and murder are old friends,' murmured Biggles. 'I take it they haven't found the treasure yet ? '

'Evidently not.'

'Counting their chickens before they're hatched — as usual.'

'They're hot on the trail. The crew must have been watching, for they say they've found the spot.'

'Is that all ? '

'That's all. They're still talking, but I thought I'd better let you know how things stood.'

Marcel looked at Biggles. 'What is the plan, my old cabbage ? '

'There are two courses open to us,' replied Biggles. 'One is for you to go back to headquarters, bring back half a dozen policemen, or soldiers, and arrest the whole bunch of them. That's the sensible, the most practical way. I don't say it's the romantic way.'

That would be to wait until they've found the treasure, then jump on them and have fun and games with the doubloons.'

'That's me, every time,' murmured Bertie. 'I'm all for the jolly old ducats, pieces of eight, and what have you.'

'The snag about that is, some of us are liable to be shot,' said Biggles.

'The sight of gold sends men mad, and this bunch wouldn't be likely to hand over the spondulucks without making a fight of it.'

'There isn't any treasure to fight over yet,' put in Algy practically.

'There may never be any.'

'The working party are going flat out,' said Ginger.

'They expect to strike the gold at any moment now. They've seen the aircraft and have guessed it's looking for them.'

'We will fetch help,' decided Marcel suddenly. 'It is best for me to go.

I am French. When the Governor sees my papers he will take notice of me.

You stay here and see these rascals do not run away.'

'You mean, you'll go alone ? '

'But of course. It will make more room in the machine for police when I come back. I will land here.'

'I think you're right,' agreed Biggles. 'After all, they haven't found the treasure yet and there's no sense in taking unnecessary risks.'

'Bon. I go,' said Marcel. come back tout de suite. A bientôt.' He strode off down the track they had made on the outward march.

'What do we do? Just sit here ? ' Algy asked Biggles.

'I can't think of anything better. There's no point in sweating about in these infernal bushes with a chance of being spotted. Whether the diggers find the gold or not they'll come back to the yacht. We'll stay where we can watch it. What's the time ? ' He looked at his watch.
'Half past one.

Marcel ought to be back before nightfall. One of you might go back to where we saw those bananas and bring a bunch along. That should save us pulling in our belts.'

As Ginger had already been out Algy and Bertie undertook this congenial task, leaving Biggles and Ginger to watch the yacht.

Nothing happened. The yacht's crew continued to talk, smoke and argue.

Algy and Bertie returned with a load of bananas. They ate some. Still they watched. Still nothing happened. The sun was nearly down to the horizon.

'What's Marcel up to ? ' muttered Algy. 'He should be back by now.'

'Something unexpected must have held him up,' opined Biggles.

Dusk closed in.

'He won't come back to-night,' said Ginger. 'Looks as if we've got to spend the night here. There's no future in that.'

There was a brief period of interest when the digging party returned to their yacht. The crew dispersed to their duties. A rope was lowered down the face of rock. One by one the three men who had been out lowered themselves to the deck. None carried anything.

'They haven't got the treasure,' observed Ginger.

'They must leave their tools where they've been working,' remarked Algy.

Night fell. Mosquitoes hummed. Stars glowed like beacons in the sky.

Lights appeared in the portholes of the yacht.

'No mutiny yet,' said Bertie.

'There's nothing to mutiny about,' answered Biggles. 'The men have more sense than to go off at half-cock. They'll let their owners find the treasure before they do anything.'

When the gold appears the rumpus will start. That is as certain as to-morrow morning will follow to-night.'

Squatting on the ground, with their backs against trees, they waited for the night to pass.

Ginger's last words, as he swiped a mosquito from his face, were: 'If this is treasure hunting I'd rather see it on television. You can look without being bitten to bits by bugs.'

'That's all right, old boy,' answered Bertie. 'But the trouble about television is, you don't get the jolly old swag at the end of it.'

'We haven't seen it here, yet, if it comes to that,' Ginger pointed out.

The dawn broke without a sound except the murmur of wavelets on the beach, giving promise of another fine, hot day. Discomfort had made the night seem unending; and even when it was banished by the sun it seemed to go with reluctance. Activity on the yacht recommenced forthwith, making it clear that the treasure-seekers were eager to continue their quest. Ginger wondered why, if Tew had some information, he could not have been honest with the French government. It would, he felt sure, have given him a fair share. Thus would he have been saved not only a load of anxiety but spared the risk of losing all, as now seemed likely.

With the watchers listening intently for the drone of the returning aircraft the gold-diggers climbed their rope and disappeared into the jungle beyond the end of the little delta.

'Something's gone wrong or Marcel would be here by now,' declared Biggles, after a little while.

Two hours passed. Nothing happened on land, on the yacht, or in the air.

'I'm getting a bit cheesed with this,' grumbled Ginger. 'I vote—'

What he was going to vote was never heard, for at this juncture there came a shout, as of triumph, from not far away, in the direction taken by the treasure hunters. It cut Ginger off short and brought them all to their feet.

'By Jove! Is that the merry old savages having another go— ? '

'There aren't any savages,' cut in Biggles. 'I wonder what's going on.

Let's go and see.

Like Ginger I've had about enough of sitting here doing nothing. The yacht isn't likely to slip its mooring if there's gold in the offing.'

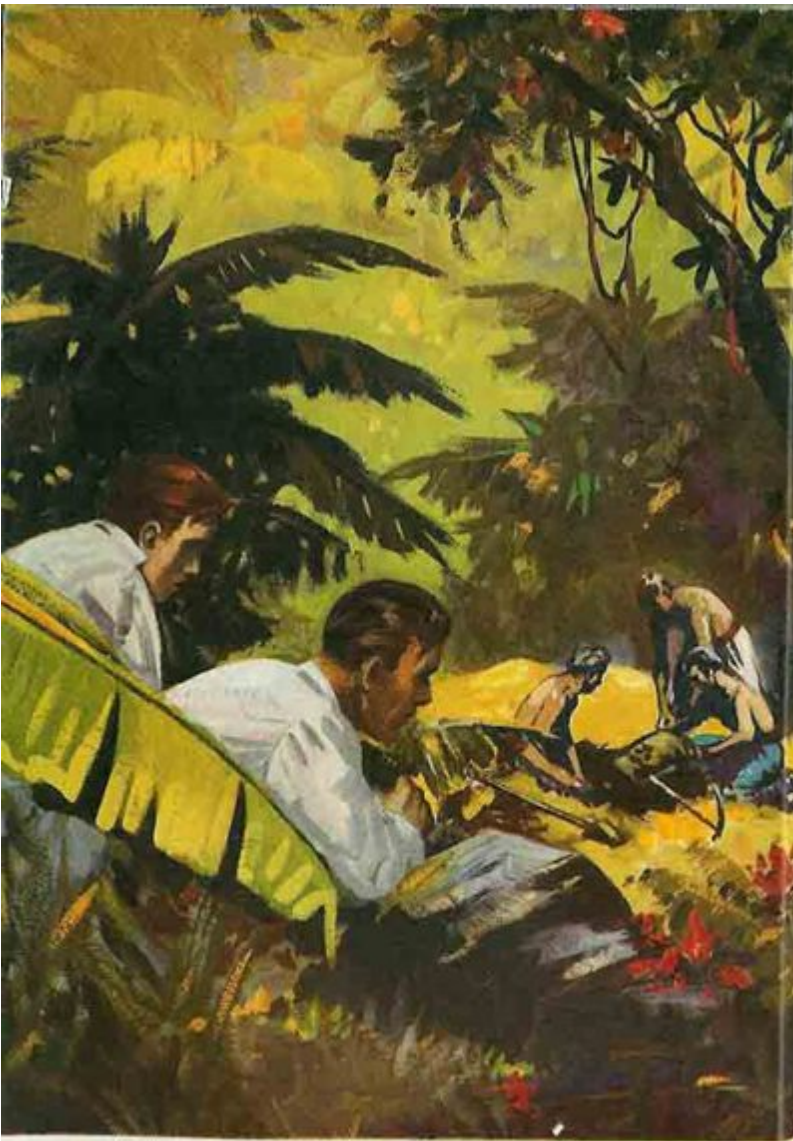
They set off in the direction from which the sound had come; and they had not gone far when they came upon

ample evidence of what had been going on. There was an open space, black, where the dry herbage had been burnt off. There trenches had been dug in several directions, revealing that the diggers had at least located the site of one of the pirate forts; for baulks of timber, rotten with age, lay about. There were also some squared pieces of rock. But none of these held the attention of Biggles's party for long. Far more important was the behaviour of three men on the far side of the

clearing, perhaps a hundred yards away.

Stripped to the waist they were working like madmen, one wielding a pick, another a crowbar, and the other shovelling away the earth that had been loosened.

'I told you gold sent men mad,' said Biggles drily. 'Let's see if we can get closer. We can't walk across the open ground.'



Fascinated, the spectators watched (page 31)

By following the fringe of the jungle, however, they managed to get within twenty or so yards without being discovered. So intent were the men on what they were doing that Ginger suspected that nothing less than an exploding bomb would have distracted their attention.

The climax of this feverish labour was reached just as Biggles's party lay down in the deep shadow of the jungle to watch. What had

happened needed no explanation. The men had uncovered the top of a box, or chest.

This had been responsible for the first shout. In their desperate haste to get the box out of the ground they had torn the handle off it. This had necessitated more digging in order that the box might be lifted bodily.

Biggles and his companions were just in time to see it prised out of the earth. It was not a very big box - perhaps two feet long, a foot wide and eighteen inches deep. Of what material it was made, wood, leather or metal, the watchers did not for the moment know.

But apparently the workers knew, and the fury with which they attacked it with their tools brought from Biggles the remark: 'Mad as hatters.' As they struck at it they shouted with glee.

The lid of the box flew off to an accompaniment of ringing cheers. The cheers ended abruptly as the men stared into the box. Then they broke out anew, and the fascinated spectators had the unique experience of watching the behaviour of men on the discovery of a treasure. For a minute they acted like lunatics; then, seizing their implements, they began digging again in a sort of frenzy.

'Ha! They haven't got enough,' said Biggles whimsically. 'They're hoping to find more.'

But we must at least give them this. They came to find a treasure.

Apparently they've found it. And that's more than most people who go treasure hunting can say. Where the deuce is Marcel?'

Not a sound, not a movement came from the sky.

'If these fellows pack up and decide to pull out with what they've got they look like getting away with it,' remarked Algy. 'To take them on ourselves would be asking for trouble.'

'Once they're on the high seas they're safe,' said Biggles. 'We daren't

touch them. If we did, we should be pirates. Ha! that'd be a joke, wouldn't it? The French Navy wouldn't dare to touch them, either, without risking an international kick-up.'

'If they've any sense they'll go, while the going's good,' reasoned Algy.

'That's just what they are going to do, I think,' returned Biggles. 'What the dickens is Marcel up to ? '

There was no answer to this question. But the treasure hunters were evidently satisfied that there was no more gold in that particular cache, for they threw their tools into it, and then proceeded to transfer the treasure from the box in which it had lain so long to haversacks that had contained food. The weight of the haversacks could be judged by the effort required by the carriers.

'At least they're having fun,' murmured Bertie.

'How long is it going to last, I wonder ? ' sighed Biggles. 'Let's get back to our position where we can watch the yacht. If the crew is going to cut up rough it will be now.'

They made their way through the jungle to their original vantage point, losing sight of the treasure bearers who were on the far side of one of the arms of the delta. These men either travelled in haste, or had an easier passage, for by the time Biggles's party was back in position to observe the yacht they were on board. They did not stay on deck, where the crew stood watching them, but immediately went below. As soon as they were out of sight the crew, with significant gestures, strode aft, where they went into a huddle, heads together.

'Take a look,' whispered Biggles. 'If ever I saw trouble being brewed, it's on that deck.'

This sort of thing has happened over and over again, yet men never seem to learn the lesson. All Tew and his pals below deck can see is gold.

Look! There they go - with an ultimatum, no doubt.'

The crew were now moving in a purposeful manner towards the companion-way, led by a big, loose-limbed fellow, with a shock of flaxen hair. He was stripped to the waist. His sun-tanned arms and torso were heavily tattooed.

'Don't you think we ought to do something about this ? ' queried Algy.

'Certainly not,' replied Biggles promptly. 'Let them work it out themselves. If we butted in the chances are they'd join farces and go for us. We're not in our own country, anyway.

Marcel may still arrive in time to take a hand. I'm not moving unless they try to leave.'

The crew, after a brief hesitation, with signs to each other enjoining silence and caution, crept down the companion stairs.

'If it's a matter of stopping the yacht from getting away we should be able to do it,'

averred Ginger. 'The tide's flooding. If we cut the two cables holding her she'd drift on to that bit of beach a little lower down.'

'I think you've got something there,' assented Biggles. 'Incidentally, what have they tied up to? They couldn't have made fast to the rock itself. Can I see a ring - an iron ring. Yes, by thunder! I can see several. Those fellows wouldn't have bothered to do that. A yacht wouldn't carry such tackle. The rings are red rust, anyway. They must have been here for

. . . Why, what a fool I am! This is pirate work. This is where they moored their ships.

This was the cove that served as a harbour for Libertia. It sticks out like a sore finger.'

'I say ! How absolutely enthralling ! ' exclaimed Bertie.

But these enchanting speculations were brought to an abrupt conclusion by others, more to the point, concerning what was happening on the yacht.

Voices could be heard, rising ever higher in protest, indignation, anger, and finally - so it seemed - threats. Then came a shot, followed by a brisk fusillade. A man appeared on deck, running. He stumbled and fell.

He rose, struggled to the rail and threw himself overboard. He managed to make a few strokes and then sank. The big flaxen-haired man, who had followed him, a revolver in his hand, ran to the rail, stared for a moment at the disturbed water and then went back down the stairs.

'This is no longer amusing,' muttered Biggles grimly. 'This is murder.'

'It's certainly real pirate stuff- if that's what we wanted,' said Algy softly. 'Isn't it time we did something about it ? ' 'Yes. No - wait a minute.'

To their horror, although not particularly to their surprise, the watchers saw two bodies dragged on deck and thrown overboard. The murderers, now subdued as if startled by what they had done, looked at each other and then went back down the stairs.

'This is too much,' declared Algy. 'We should have acted before.'

'In which case we might have been the ones to go overboard,' answered Biggles curtly. '

I'd rather have it as it is.' 'What are they doing now ? '

'In all probability counting the coins which Tew's ancestor got by shedding blood.

Queer, isn't it, how so often the past can come back and swipe you. Give those scoundrels enough time and they'll shoot each other. But this is our chance. We'll cut those cables and keep the crew below while she drifts. Ginger, you take the forward cable. Bertie, you go aft. Algy, you'll come with me to the head of the companion. No noise. She may run aground before they realize what's happened. If she grounds she should stick there. The tide's on the turn. Come on.'

They ran forward, Biggles leading, his automatic in his hand.

It took them about ten minutes to reach the edge of the cliff above the yacht, for they had to go some way round and then wade across one of the arms of the delta. They could hear the men laughing and talking below.

They could also hear the dull chink of money being counted.

Biggles was first down the rope. He crept to the head of the companion-way. There Algy joined him. The others went to their respective posts.

Ginger was the first to cut his cable. Instantly the bows began to swing.

Then the stern moved slowly from the rock and the yacht was free. Ginger and Bertie, their work done, tiptoed to where the others were standing by the superstructure just aft of the companion cover.

Silence fell, a strange attentive silence broken occasionally by the clink of gold that had just added three more lives to its list of victims. The yacht, broadside on, moved slowly towards the beach. The sun blazed down. A gull drifted over the cove on rigid wings.

Ginger could imagine the fair-haired man counting out the gold while the others watched with suspicious eyes.

The yacht had nearly reached the beach when one of those below discovered what was happening. He may have felt a movement. He may have looked through a porthole and noticed that the yacht was

adrift. Anyway, there was a yell. It was followed by a scamper of feet. A tousled head appeared level with the deck.

The expression of amazement on the man's face when he saw Biggles standing there was photographed on Ginger's brain for all time.

'Get back and stay back,' ordered Biggles harshly. The head disappeared.

A babble broke out below.

The fair-haired man showed his face. His eyes, too, were round with wonder.

'Get back,' snapped Biggles.

A tattooed arm, the hand holding a revolver, came into sight.

Biggles's pistol spat.

The arm was snatched back.

There was a slight jar as the yacht grounded. She took on a list and remained motionless.

A voice below shouted: 'What do you want ? '

'You,' answered Biggles.

There was a short discussion below. Then came the question: 'How much do you want to lay off?'

'We don't want anything,' answered Biggles. 'But there are some men on the bottom who'

‘I want your heads. The French still use the guillotine. Lay down your weapons and come up one at a time and you’ll have a fair trial.’

The invitation was ignored. There was another discussion below. Biggles smiled faintly as voices took on a note of recrimination as if the men were blaming each other for what had happened.

Ginger was wondering how long this state of affairs was going to last, for if those below could not come up, those on deck could not go below.

The answer came from the sky. Perhaps the men below heard the approaching aircraft, too, for one of them shouted: ‘How about a thousand guineas ? ’

‘You won’t need guineas where you’re going,’ Biggles assured the speaker.

It seemed that this remark was taken seriously; or as Biggles said, what was more likely, the murderers hoped by disposing of the motive for their crime, to make their conviction more difficult. At all events, a curious splashing sound took Ginger to the side, and there to his astonishment —

and, it must be admitted, consternation — he saw a steady stream of gold coins pouring into the blue water. He told Biggles what the men were doing.

‘The fools. The silly fools. As if that will save them,’ said Biggles.

The helicopter came roaring low overhead. Ginger waved his handkerchief although this was hardly necessary, for the yacht, clear of the rock and overhanging trees, was now in plain view.

Marcel put the machine down neatly on the beach. From it sprang six blue-uniformed gendarmes, pistols in their hands. Marcel followed. ‘What happens ? ’ he called.

'They're all here except three. Come and get 'em,' answered Biggles.

'Where are the others ? '

'On the bottom.'

'Ten thousand devils!' gasped Marcel.

'No, just five,' returned Biggles.

The gendarmes splashed their way to the yacht.

The modern pirates gave themselves up without firing a shot. But then, as Biggles remarked, what else could they do? Their case was bad enough without killing a policeman.

Marcel apologized profusely for being so long away but he had had some slight engine trouble. The delay, therefore, was through no fault of his.

As things fell out it may have been for the best.

Thus ended the story of the Madagascar treasure. It began with bloodshed, and, as so often happens, it ended in bloodshed. Not in any way could it be described as the picnic Marcel had so confidently anticipated.

By evening the prisoners were in gaol and the airmen back at their base.

The French authorities had little difficulty in recovering the treasure, or most of it, from the shallow water into which it had been thrown. It was not so great as had been expected, amounting to fewer than twenty thousand gold coins of several reigns and nationalities. The French authorities took the view that this was the pirate Tew's private cache, an opinion that was supported by an old document, with a

sketch map, apparently in his own handwriting, which was found in a pocket of the modern Tew when the bodies were recovered from the bottom of the cove.

The dead man, who had been so foolish as to try to gain the treasure by underhand means, had no doubt found the document in some old family books or papers.

As a matter of detail, the French authorities, believing that the main bulk of the treasure was still in the vicinity of the cove, spent some time digging. But nothing more was found, and by that time the airmen had returned home.

As for the crew of the yacht, their defence was that Tew had fired the first shot after an argument about the division of the treasure; and this was difficult to disprove. It might have been true, particularly if the crew had adopted a threatening attitude. So the trial dragged on and on, until the prisoners, who claimed to be American citizens, were handed over to their own country for punishment. The real reason for this was, the murdered men were Americans. One was a well-known yachtsman, and a wealthy one. It seems that Tew, who was in fact a descendant of the famous pirate, had no money. When he came upon the clue to the treasure it was to this unfortunate man he had gone with a proposition for the recovery of the gold. He would supply the map if the other man would provide the vessel. This was agreed, and the yacht owner had taken a friend with him — to his death, as it transpired.

Of course, there was nothing wrong with the treasure hunt itself. Where Tew and his associates made the mistake was in not going to the French authorities. Had they put their cards on the table no doubt the French government would have given them a fair deal. Naturally, this would have meant giving up part of the treasure, if it was found. For this apparently they were not prepared. They wanted the lot; instead of which they got nothing.

We may suppose that the owner of the yacht trusted his crew. What he may have overlooked was, as Biggles had remarked, the sight of gold makes some men mad.

THE CASE OF

THE OBLIGING TOURIST

It began with one of those chance meetings which so often occur in the affairs of men to upset the best calculated schemes; and such meetings, traced to their beginnings, usually depend upon an incident so trivial in itself that no stretch of the imagination could foresee the consequences.

And police records reveal that from this unpredictable factor the criminal has much to fear.

Dressing, Biggles broke his sock suspender. He went out to buy a new one.

Ginger went with him. It was a fine summer morning.

Stopping to look in a shop window Ginger recognized the face of a girl looking in the same window. It was as simple as that.

He nudged Biggles and said: 'Look who's standing next to you.'

Biggles looked. The girl turned. Their eyes met. Both smiled.

'Hello,' said Biggles. 'You were one of the WAAF's in my Orderly Room during the war, weren't you? Your name — let me see — Alice Hall ? '

The girl smiled delightedly. 'Right. And you're Biggles — sorry, I mean Squadron Leader Bigglesworth.'

They shook hands.

'How's civil life treating you ? ' asked Biggles.

'No complaints. I got a job with a good firm and am still in it.'

'You're looking fine and fit.'

'Just had my holidays — only got back last night. Went to the south of France with a Cook's tour. Ten days in Nice. Not much money, but I had a lovely time.'

'You had enough money to buy yourself a nice French handbag, I see.'

'I didn't buy it. It was a present.'

'Boy friend, eh ? '

'Oh, no. There was nothing like that about it,' asserted the girl quickly. 'I didn't know the man from Adam. I did something to oblige him and he gave me the bag. It was easy. All I had to do was post a packet for him when I got to England.'

The smile remained on Biggles's face but the humour went out of his eyes.

'What was in the packet?'

'I don't know. I didn't ask.'

'Did you show it to the Customs Officials when you landed ? '

'No. The man said there was no need.'

'So you posted it.'

'Yes. It was already stamped. All I had to do was drop it in the letter-box when I got to Victoria Station.'

'Did you have to register it ? '

'No. Ordinary letter post. So it couldn't have been anything valuable.'

'I suppose not,' returned Biggles casually. 'Where did you meet this man

? '

'At Nice. I was having a cup of tea on the terrace of the Ruhl Hotel with some of the girls in the party. We were talking about going home the next day and I suppose he must have heard us. He was sitting close. Then he asked me to post the packet.'

Was he a Britisher ? '

'No. He was a foreigner, but he spoke English well.'

Nice-looking young fellow, eh?' teased Biggles.

'Oh, no. He was a dark, fat little man of about sixty, with a squint in one eye. Black handlebar moustaches that some of the boys in the RAF would have envied.' The girl laughed. 'So there was nothing like that about it.'

'Just as a matter of interest, did he say why he didn't want to post the packet in France?'

'He said it would be quicker if I took it.'

'You were travelling by train ? '

'Of course.'

'Didn't you point out that the quickest way would be by airmail, from Nice airport?'

'I didn't think of that.'

'Did you notice who the packet was addressed to ? '

'Yes. I read the address several times. The package was in my handbag.

The Customs man made me pay seventeen shillings duty on the bag.'

'What was the address ? '

'It was easy to remember. It was to Miss Mary Jones, care of a Mr.

Cermak, in the Tottenham Court Road - number a hundred and one A.'
The girl was looking worried. '

Have I done anything wrong ? '

'Well, you should have declared the package at Customs,' chided Biggles gently.

'He said there was no need.'

'Perhaps it didn't matter,' murmured Biggles. 'Well, it's been nice seeing you again.

Where did you say you were working ? '

'Parkes, the furnishing people in Holborn.'

Biggles held out his hand. 'We must meet again one day and have a chat about old times. Good-bye for now.' 'Good-bye, sir.'

Biggles turned away and hailed a cruising taxi. 'Drive along the Tottenham Court Road till I tell you to stop,' he ordered.

'Going to have a look at Mr. Cermak's establishment ? ' queried

Ginger.

'That's the idea.'

'You think there's something going on?'

'I can think of only one reason why a man should ask a completely strange girl to post a packet for him in England.' 'He didn't want it to be checked.'

'That's the obvious answer.'

'Why didn't he bring it himself?'

'Too risky. Hopeless, in fact, if he happened to have a police record.'

'Alice was indiscreet - to say the least.'

'She's a plain, simple, straightforward girl. That, of course, is why the man picked on her.'

He'd chosen his type carefully. Who would be less likely to carry contraband than a working girl doing a tour on what she can save up in the year? I'm hoping that as the packet was only posted late last night it won't have been delivered yet.' To the driver he called. 'All right.'

This'll do.' He got out, paid the fare, and walked slowly along the pavement.

Mr. Cermak's establishment turned out to be a small, unprepossessing newspaper and tobacco shop. The 'licence to sell tobacco' plate over the door confirmed the name, Otto Cermak.

'Mr. Cermak may, or may not, know what he's doing,' said Biggles, as he walked on slowly. 'Did you notice the letter rack inside the door?'

It's an accommodation address.

Many of these little shops run that sort of sideline for people who have no fixed address

— or, if they have, don't want their letters delivered at home. We'll keep an eye on the place for a little while to see what sort of clientele Mr. Cermak relies on for his business.

There's a café over the way. We might as well sit down.'

They crossed the street, entered a rather tawdry tea-shop, and taking the window seat ordered coffee.

During the next half-hour about a score of people called at the shop. All went straight in and out, holding in their hands a newspaper or packet of cigarettes. In none of these was Biggles interested.

'Here comes the postman,' said Ginger suddenly.

'That's our cue,' replied Biggles. Dropping some money on the table he hurried out, and dodging the traffic crossed the street. They reached the shop on the heels of the postman and followed him in.

The postman handed to the man behind the counter some letters and a small brown-paper package secured with gummed tape. 'That's the lot,' he said cheerfully, and went out.

The shopkeeper pushed the mail aside and looked at Biggles enquiringly.

'Packet of Players,' said Biggles. He paid for the cigarettes and left the shop.

'Nice work,' murmured Ginger. 'That must have been the packet Alice brought over.'

'It would be a coincidence if it weren't.'

'Now what ? '

'We'll hang around for a glance at Miss Mary Jones. I imagine we shan't have long to wait. If that packet contains anything important she'll soon be after it.'

'Assuming she knows it's here.'

'It would be a simple matter for the man in Nice to send her a cable, worded discreetly, to tell her the packet was on its way. Not to this address, of course. It would go to her real address, under her own name.'

'You think the Mary Jones stuff is phoney.'

'It sounds like a name of convenience. Hello! What's this ? '

A nearly new Austin had pulled into the curb a few doors farther along. A dark, attractive-looking woman of middle age, simply but expensively dressed, got out.

Without looking right or left she walked quickly to the shop and emerged a moment later still in the act of putting the package in her handbag.

She returned to the car, got in and drove off.

'CVR199,' read Ginger, taking the number of the car. 'Aren't you going to follow it ? '

'No. If that lady is what I suspect she is she would always be on the look-out for anyone following her. We'll go to the Yard and have a word with Inspector Gaskin of 'C'

Department. This is really his affair more than ours.' Biggles raised his hand to a taxi.

A quarter of an hour later they were in the office of the burly, pipe-smoking detective. '

What's on your mind ? ' he inquired.

'Nothing much,' answered Biggles. 'The other day, though, you told me you had something on yours.'

'Too true I have. This smuggling racket is getting me down. You know something?'

asked the inspector shrewdly.

'Possibly. While we're talking you might look up Austin Ten, registered CYR199.'

The Inspector put the enquiry through on the inter-com and turned back to Biggles, who asked: 'Does this smuggling that worries you take any particular form ? '

'Dope and diamonds are the big stuff.'

'If you can't catch your birds how do you know it's going on ? '

'Partly through our agents and partly by casual information.'

'What do you mean by casual information ? '

'I'll give you an example. About two months ago a man very much in the public eye was in Paris with his wife. In one of the high-class jewellers in the Rue de la Paix the wife saw a diamond and emerald bracelet. Price, about five thousand. The lady wanted it, and the

husband was prepared to buy it for her regardless of the fact that purchase tax and import duty would about double that figure. The Currency Control Board refused to grant the money and that was that. The lady didn't get her bangle. When, not long afterwards, at a big reception in London, she saw it on the wrist of another woman, she was very annoyed. So, naturally, was her husband. He complained to his M.P. Result, a rap for me - because that jewel never came through Customs. How it got in I don't know.

I wish I did, for this isn't the only piece of high-class stuff that's been slipped in under the curtain.'

'What about the lady who now owns the bangle ? ' 'There can be no question of her smuggling anything. She

and her husband are a long way above that sort of thing.' 'Couldn't you ask her where she got it ? '

'No, because that would be an implication of suspected fraud; and in this country we have to be careful about that sort of thing. I'd stake my life that she doesn't suspect for a moment that it was smuggled in.'

'No question of duplication ? '

'If the firm that made that jewel duplicated their wares they'd soon be out of business.

Actually, this is really the headache of the Customs and Excise people, but they expect us to handle the criminal side. Now perhaps you'd tell me what all this is leading up to ? '

Before Biggles could answer a clerk came in and laid a slip on the inspector's desk.

Gaskin glanced at it, then back at Biggles. 'The car that has provoked your curiosity belongs to the Contessa di Malliori.'

'Who's she ? '

'If you read the Society news you'd know she's a well-known hostess in London. Italian by birth. Came to this country during the Mussolini regime and has been here ever since.

She has a swish place in Regent's Park. You'll see her name among the guests at every important function.'

'If she's been here for so long what does she use for money ? '

The inspector looked pained. 'You're not suggesting—?'

'I'm not suggesting anything. I asked a simple question. Knowing what it costs me to live, and I'm a man of simple tastes, I wondered what size of an income flows into the Contessa's pockets for her to maintain her standard of luxury. But let that pass. As an alien you'll have a docket on her.'

'Yes.'

'And a photograph ? '

'I expect so.'

'May I see it ? '

The inspector phoned again. 'I hope you're going to justify this expenditure of valuable time, my lad,' he told Biggles.

'If I can't I shall have wasted my own,' answered Biggles drily.

The docket was brought. Biggles looked at the photograph, and with a curious smile showed it to Ginger. 'Very interesting,' he murmured, passing it back to the inspector. '

Pretty name, Contessa Malliori. Fancy swopping it for Mary Jones!'

'What are you talking about ? ' muttered the inspector irritably.

Biggles considered the request. 'No — it's a pity to have to leave a story half told. I'll see if I can finish it. But before I go, may I have a look through your rogues' gallery? The Italian division.'

'Not expecting to find the Countess in it by any chance ? '

'No,' admitted Biggles. 'She'd be the last person you'd suspect of running contraband.

Well, almost the last.'

The implication was not lost on the inspector. His shrewd eyes searched Biggles's face. '

At least tell me this,' he pleaded. 'Who, in your opinion, would be the very last person ? '

Biggles' eyes twinkled. 'Never mind me. The last person the Customs Officers would suspect of carrying a jewel worth five thousand pounds would be a simple English working girl travelling in a Cook's Tour on what she could put by for the holidays. Am I right ? '

'Is that how it's being done?'

'It could be.'

A large album of photographs was brought in and put on the table. As Biggles slowly turned the pages he asked: 'Any of these ladies and gentlemen would, I imagine, be searched on entering this country ? '

'They couldn't hope to smuggle a brass farthing.'

Biggles stopped turning. Looking over his shoulder, Ginger looked

down at a fleshy, elderly man, with a swarthy face, handlebar moustaches and a cast in one eye. Below was the name and particulars. Carlo Antonio Barrosa. Born Sicily 1895.

Biggles looked up at the inspector. 'Do you happen to know in what part of Italy the Contessa was born ? '

'In Sicily, I believe.'

Biggles smiled. 'The plot thickens, as the books say,' he said softly. He closed the album and picked up his hat. 'We'll follow the trail a little farther,' he murmured. 'If it turns out to be the right one I'll tell you where to send your boys along with the handcuffs. So long. Come on, Ginger.'

Little was said on the way home. Reaching the apartment Biggles tossed his hat aside and dropped into an easy chair. Suddenly he grinned. 'We've had quite a morning, haven't we? Alice Hall certainly started something.

We've gone pretty fast, too, but this, I fancy, is where we begin to slow down.'

'You're going through with it, then ? '

'Too true I am. It's on account of these smugglers that decent people have to be searched when they enter or leave the country. Aside from that I think it's monstrous that a dupe should be made of a nice girl like Alice Hall. We know she acted in good faith. But the Customs people are tough. They have to be. Had that packet been found on Alice she would have probably have gone to gaol.'

'What do we do next ? '

'Let's run over what we know. Smuggling on a big scale is rife. High on the list of contraband is expensive jewellery which, weighing practically nothing, is hard to detect.

Yesterday Alice Hall came through with something – we don't know what: obviously she was innocent of fraud or she wouldn't have told us about it. The packet was given to her in Nice by one Carlo Antonio Barrosa, a Sicilian with a criminal record. It was collected over here by another Sicilian, a woman using the name of Mary Jones. The hookup of nationalities might be coincidence, of course. Barrosa and the Contessa may have known each other in Sicily, which is not a very large island.

The title may not be genuine. Even if it is it means little, for in Italy Contessas are two a penny. If our suspicions are correct, this lady is now in possession of a valuable piece of jewellery. She will, we may suppose, sell it at a profit, a nice profit too, bearing in mind that no duty was paid on it. To whom will she sell it? To a jeweller? No. That would be asking for trouble. No jeweller with that amount of money would dare to handle stuff as hot as that. In fact, the jewel could hardly be sold publicly at all, for if it were, questions would be asked about it.

This is no cheap trinket. Very well. What other way is there of disposing of it? My guess is that the Countess will sell it privately through her connections in high society – which doesn't mean, of course, that the buyer will suspect anything illegal in the deal. In a word, it looks to me as if this is how the Countess manages to live in style. This morning's consignment wasn't the first, you may be sure.'

'What beats me,' put in Ginger, 'is that Barrosa was prepared to entrust the goods to an unknown girl.'

'I don't think there was much risk attached to that,' declared Biggles.

'The average person is honest and reliable in such matters. Alice, for instance. She would have gone to untold trouble to fulfil her obligation.

As for Customs, the risk was negligible, and therein lies the clever part of the scheme. The person carrying the contraband would be unaware of it.

Customs Officers are trained for their job. They have eyes like hawks. A hesitant answer, or a glib one; the flicker of an eyelid; a mere suspicion of nervousness and they've got you. As they haven't time to search everyone to the skin it is upon such signs that they rely. If the person carrying contraband is unaware of it such signs are not

forthcoming. We've been through Customs a good many times but we've never been searched. Why? Because we had nothing to declare. If ever you are fool enough to try to bring something in you might find it a very different story.'

'I'll remember it,' promised Ginger. 'Where do we go from here ? '

'The first thing is to find out what is in these packages that are coming over, and that may not be as easy as it sounds.'

'But the Post Office has only to open the next packet addressed to Miss Mary Jones, and—'

'They may refuse to do that. A dim view is taken of any interference with the Royal Mail.

Suppose they did cooperate and a jewel was found. What then? Barrosa, being in France, would get away with it. And the Contessa would disclaim all knowledge of the packet, which, after all, isn't addressed to her under her own name. The crooks would simply lose a jewel, which they can well afford, and then think out another scheme. No. We've got to get them red-handed, with the goods on them. I have a feeling that to get both of them in the bag we shall have to start at the other end, which means bringing Marcel Brissac, of the French

Suirecté, into the picture. Barrosa is, of course, breaking the French law as well as ours.

Just a minute. Let me think about this.'

Biggles was silent for some time, deep in thought, but at last he looked up. 'I think I've got it,' he said. 'Let's run over to Paris and have a word with Marcel. When we've got the Nice end tied up we'll see Gaskin.

'I'll tell you the set-up on the way.'

Three days later a rather prim-looking Englishwoman strolled on to

the terrace of the Ruhl Hotel, Nice, and sitting at one of the small round tables ordered tea. It was not by accident that she chose a table near the one occupied by Carlo Barrosa, for she was, in fact, a police-woman from the Yard's special squad and she had studied the Sicilian's photograph well before she had started.

In a few minutes, Barrosa having found an opening, they were in conversation. Soon afterwards he moved his chair to her table. An hour later they were still talking, Barrosa with great earnestness. Presently she looked at her watch. They both got up.

Barrosa was in the act of handing over a small package when two men who had been standing talking not far away closed in on him swiftly, one on either side.

The Italian must have realized instantly what was happening for he was off in a flash, only to run into the arms of a waiting gendarme. Cursing and struggling he was secured and brought face to face with the Englishwoman. In front of half a dozen police witnesses the package was opened carefully and eyes saucered as she lifted out of it a magnificent diamond necklace.

Still cursing Barrosa was led away.

The British police agent carefully re-wrapped the package at the Commissariat de Police before being taken in a police car to the railway station.

When the boat train drew into Victoria the next evening she dropped the packet in the station letter-box.

The morning following saw an unusual amount of activity both inside and outside the little newsagent's shop in the Tottenham Court Road. Two window cleaners were at work near the door. A burly figure in a dark suit, smoking a pipe, was sorting some magazines with the help of an assistant. Mr. Cermak, rather pale, was dragging nervously on a cigarette. 'Why don't you tell me what it is all about, Inspector,' he complained. 'I don't know anything. I swear it. I'd help the police '

'Just carry on with your work. Remember what I told you, and try not to look as if I was going to bite you,' growled Inspector Gaskin.

This masquerade did not last long. A few customers called for newspapers or cigarettes.

The postman delivered some letters and a small package. A few minutes later an Austin Ten drew up and a good-looking, well-dressed woman entered.

'Have you anything for Miss Mary Jones ? ' she inquired. 'Are you Miss Mary Jones ? '

asked the shopkeeper.

'Of course I am. You know that perfectly well,' answered the woman, with a touch of asperity.

Cermak handed over the packet. 'Is this yours ? '

The woman read the address. 'Yes, this is mine,' she said curtly. 'You should know me by this time.' She caught her breath sharply as she glanced behind her and saw four men standing there. The colour drained from her face.

'Excuse me, madam,' said Inspector Gaskin. 'I am an officer from Scotland Yard and I must see the contents of that packet. Four witnesses have heard you say that you are Miss Mary Jones and that the package is yours.'

The Contessa di Malliori did not answer. She had fainted. 'Get her inside,' said the inspector crisply.

Biggles was looking through his morning mail when the phone rang. He picked up the receiver, and a slow smile spread over his face as he listened. 'That was Gaskin,' he told Ginger as he hung up. 'They're both in the bag.'

'What was in the packet ? '

'A diamond necklace which has been identified as part of a big jewel raid recently in one of the swagger villas in the South of France. It'll be some time, I fancy, before the Countess gives any more of her famous parties. And all because I happened to bust a suspender! Queer how things work out, isn't it ? '

NIGHT FLIGHT

'We shall have to do something about these missing machines, Bigglesworth.' The eyes that Air Commodore Raymond, head of the Air Section at Scotland Yard, turned to meet those of his chief operational pilot, were sombre with worry.

'Not another ? '

'Yes. Word has just come through. One of the new Planets belonging to Orient Airways.'

'Where did it happen this time?'

'Same place. Over the Eastern Mediterranean. London-Cyprus night service.

Mostly freight and mails for the troops in the Middle East. The radio operator spoke to Nicosia at eleven. All was well. Weather fine. Machine running on time. After that, silence.

Searchers report not a trace. That's the fourth machine gone in a month, all in the same area. Don't tell me it's coincidence. What's going on ? '

'Your guess should be as good as mine.'

'If it goes on, the House will ask the Air Minister why — and he'll ask me. What am I going to tell him?'

Biggles smiled cynically. 'Tell him that if it continues machines will run empty and the route will have to pack up. People are getting scared.'

Aside from which, insurance rates will go up beyond economic limits. As it is, the premiums on these big new machines make it almost impossible to run them at a profit. Insurance companies will stand for flying risks, but not sabotage.'

'You think it might be - sabotage ? '

'Frankly, no. But they may think so. A machine in the drink is no use to anyone. An aircraft with a certificate of airworthiness is worth money-a lot of money. Second-hand machines are big business. There are too many little countries between here and the Orient that couldn't afford new stuff even if it were available; but they'll pay cash for anything on wings, delivered and no questions asked. Obsolete service transports, stripped of military equipment, have been showing big profits; but there are not many of them left.'

'What exactly are you saying ? '

'I'm saying that a new Planet, costing a quarter of a million, delivered behind the Iron Curtain, should be worth at least £50,000.'

'Have you any reason for making that statement ? '

'M.I.5 have a report that British and U.S. types have been seen working on the Red Route between the Near East and China. The machines that have disappeared were all East-bound. They all carried mail and freight, mostly military, for Cyprus and the Canal Zone.

,

'Then you think someone is pirating these machines ? '

Biggles shrugged. 'Why not? There's nothing easier to steal than an aircraft if you know how to fly it and have somewhere to take it. A ship needs a crew. A car can't be got out of the country. An aircraft, handled by one man, can be a thousand miles off its course before it's missed.

Once the pilot is knocked out what can the passengers do about it?

Nothing.'

'And what happens to the passengers ? '

'What happens to anyone on the wrong side of the Curtain? Don't ask me.

You should know.'

'That's a grim thought.'

'We live in grim times.' Biggles looked hard at the Air Commodore. 'Had we any particular interest in these passengers ? ' he questioned meaningly.

Raymond hesitated. 'Unfortunately, yes. On the last occasion a Queen's Messenger was on board. That might be coincidence.'

'And it might not. He would be carrying important documents, of course.'

'Yes. That makes the loss all the more lamentable.'

'It also makes the machine a more valuable prize - in the right place.'

The Mr Commodore did not answer.

Biggles went on: 'Having got away with a machine the pirate comes

back to Western Europe and repeats the performance. It's as easy as that.'

'All right. Let's say we've agreed on that,' said the Air Commodore curtly. 'What are we going to do about it ? '

'Obviously, we shall have to nail this modern Captain Kidd.'

'How? He'll carry false papers. We can't cross-check the passport of every passenger.

Most of them are foreigners. It would take too long. People fly because they're in a hurry.

,

'He must be caught on the job.'

'Are you suggesting that we arm all pilots and air crews? The passengers, if there were any, would take a dim view of that.'

'No. It isn't practicable. It wouldn't work, anyway. The pirate would shoot first. I'd better take over one of the machines and find out what's happening.'

'How can you tell which machine will be the next one selected ? '

Biggles smiled faintly. 'I'll select it myself.'

'How ? '

'By dangling a bait no crook could resist. Gold. Fascinating stuff, gold.

Let the Press know that on a certain date a certain aircraft will be carrying £100,000 in bullion to the Mid-East. It might as well be

another Planet on the Cyprus run. I'll fly the machine with my own crew in ten days' time. That'll give the pirate a chance to get back here and organize the raid. We'll repeat the programme till he takes the lure.

Even if the scheme doesn't work we stand to lose nothing.'

'Only your lives.'

'That's what policemen are paid for.'

'Okay. We'll try it. Anything you want ? '

'I'd like to see the passenger lists of the machines that have disappeared.'

'I'll get them for you.'

'Fair enough. I shall be ready when you are.'

The Planet droned on and on monotonously under a starlit sky high above a tenuous layer of mist that hid the world from view. In the cabin the ten passengers had fallen silent.

Some were dozing. In the luggage compartment, with their luggage that had been carefully checked by Customs officers at the airport, were the sealed boxes which, according to the newspapers, contained gold destined for the Middle East.

In the rear seat of the cabin, in a steward's uniform, sat Air-Constable

'Ginger'

Hebblethwaite, his eyes roving restlessly over the heads in front of him.

Over and over again he considered each in turn, speculating on the

likelihood of the pirate being among them. He knew them all by name, by age and by profession — at least, according to the particulars shown on their passports. Like most long-distance bookings it was a cosmopolitan list. A check with previous lists had revealed nothing, no clue, no duplication.

In the front seats, on either side of the gangway, were two youngish American journalists bound for Suez and the Canal Zone to cover operations for their respective papers. They had asked particularly for the front seats. Had there been a sinister reason for that or did they merely think the seats were the most comfortable? Only they knew. For a time they had talked loudly, harshly, in slick American vernacular, drinking whiskies and sodas.

They were quiet now.

Behind them sat a South African and his wife, returning home after a holiday in Britain.

The man seemed restless, fidgeting in his seat and trying to see through the window.

Next behind them were a political officer posted to the Sudan, and an immaculate, sleek spice merchant calling at Cyprus before going on to Corinth. Behind again came the representative of a Turkish tobacco firm, en route for Istanbul, and a Swiss engineer going to Abyssinia. Both looked types who might be able to fly. Finally, there was a German film director, on his way to Upper Egypt to make a desert picture. His wife was with him. The man was middle-aged, with a taciturn but clever face.

The woman, a blonde, had been pretty, but had rather gone to seed, putting on too much weight.

Thus soliloquized Ginger, watching them all.

By his right hand was a special installation. It was a switch. A touch would flash a red light on the instrument panel where Biggles and Algy Lacey sat at the controls, and in the radio compartment where Air-Constable Bertie Lissie was on duty.

Ginger's orders were simple and explicit. Should any passenger approach the bulkhead door at the forward end of the cabin the warning light was to be flashed.

He looked at his watch, and then spoke loudly and clearly over the intercom. 'Ladies and gentlemen, we are now leaving the coast on the eastern side of the Italian Peninsular.

There is fine weather ahead and we are running on time. Thank you.'

Some of the passengers stirred slightly. Others took no notice. One of the Americans called: 'There's still plenty of fog below.'

'A wide front covers Europe from the Mediterranean to Scotland,' answered Ginger glibly.

Silence fell. Ginger's nerves tingled with an anticipation from which apprehension was not entirely absent. The time had come. If anything was going to happen it could not be long delayed. With the note of its engines unchanged the Planet roared on into what, according to the timetable, was the danger zone. In flying circles it had become known as Suicide Creek.

Five minutes passed. Ten. Nothing happened. Most of the passengers appeared to be asleep. The German's head slumped forward. He snored gently. His wife picked up a newspaper and read, holding the pages close to her face as if she were short-sighted.

Why doesn't she wear glasses? thought Ginger.

He yawned. The atmosphere was conducive to sleep. It always is on a long run. The motors hum a lullaby. Boredom closed eyes. He watched, fighting drowsiness.

It struck him suddenly that the German woman was a long time reading the paragraph before her eyes. Was she reading or was she asleep? He stared.

Was the position of her head quite natural? Was the corner of the paper being lowered surreptitiously so that she could look over it; or was his imagination playing tricks? Certainly the movement was so slight that had he not been watching closely it would have passed unnoticed.

Whatever the reason, Ginger's nerves grew taut with a consciousness of impending danger, all the more disturbing because they were where they were; but the feeling would not be shaken off. His eyes raced over the passengers. None was moving. They returned to the German woman. He leaned forward until he could see her face. It was black.

Dragging himself up, for his limbs were suddenly strangely weak, he stumbled as if by accident and knocked the newspaper aside. Then he understood. She was wearing a gas mask.

On seeing that she was discovered the woman tried to fend him away, but he seized the mask and tore it off. A blow from the man behind made him stagger, but he reached the danger switch and flashed it on. The German, also masked, came at him, his hand groping at his hip pocket. But Ginger was first with his gun. It spat. The man crumpled.

The woman screamed. Ginger's gun flashed to cover her. She flung up her arms crying Wien! Nien!

By this time pandemonium reigned. Pushing their way with scant ceremony through the other passengers who had sprung up in alarm at the sound of the shot came Biggles, closely followed by Bertie.

Ginger shouted 'Look out. It's gas!'

The woman's hand was fumbling under her blouse.

Ginger, thinking she was feeling for a weapon, turned his automatic again; but she cried Not shoot. I only turn off the gas,' and dropped into her seat, wild-eyed, panting.

Then Ginger understood why she was so fat. He told Biggles what had happened. 'I grabbed her mask to make her switch off the gas; without a mask she would have had it with the rest of us. Her partner was pulling a gun on me so I had to shoot.'

'So that's how it was done,' said Biggles softly. He turned to the babbling passengers. '

'Will everyone please be seated? There has been a little trouble but it's all over.' He went forward.

A moment later the drone of the motors faded. The nose of the aircraft tilted down. Cold fresh air swept through the cabin. The machine dropped through the overcast and ten thousand points of light appeared below.

One of the Americans sprang up. 'Say! Am I crazy or are those the lights of London ? '

'They are,' Ginger told him. 'We've never been out of the metropolitan area. The company tenders its apologies and will explain later. Please don't take the delay too seriously. Another machine is standing by. You can still be in Egypt by the morning. You might have ended up somewhere quite different.'

In the radio compartment Bertie was talking to the Air Commodore, in the Control Tower.

When the Planet landed the police were waiting, with the ambulance.

THE CASE OF THE

IVORY IDOL

Air Detective-Inspector Bigglesworth had not long returned to the apartment which he shared with his police pilots, after a conference at Scotland Yard, when the housekeeper announced that two gentlemen were below, asking to see him. She couldn't catch their names, but

from their faces she judged them to be people from some outlandish part of the world.

When, a minute later, the visitors were shown into the sitting-room, it became evident that, although the callers wore well-cut European clothes, they were from Asia.

Biggles pulled forward two chairs. 'Be seated, gentlemen,' he invited.

'What's your trouble?'

'Trouble ? '

'Strangers only come to see me when they have something on their minds,'

said Biggles sadly.

The visitors, both of middle age, saw no humour in this. Their yellow-brown faces remained impassive, their dark eyes dull.

'Are you the famous Colonel Bigglesworth? ' inquired one, cautiously.

'The name is right, but the rank is somewhat flattering,' returned Biggles, smiling. 'No matter. By whom are we honoured ? '

'I am the Prince Yuan Sukang and this is my cousin and Prime Minister, the honourable Mr. Kling. We are

from the state of Kahore, which, in case you do not know — for ours is a small country

— lies on the northern frontiers of Burma and Thailand.'

'You speak English very well,' complimented Biggles. 'I gather you have not always lived in Kahore.'

The Prince hesitated. 'I had an English tutor, and was for a time in London,' he explained.

Àh! ' breathed Biggles. 'Quite so. Now tell me; in what way do you think I can help you?'

'You will have heard that my country, like the countries around it—
Burma, Thailand and Indo-China — are in a state of chaos, of
revolution and evil war.'

'So I read in the newspapers. In that case why have you come to London?'

'There is nothing I can do in Kahore. Law and order is finished. The villages are destroyed. Terrorists beset even the jungle paths. Famine and disease stalk the land. The people die.'

'Your people ? ' murmured Biggles softly.

'Yes.'

'And there is nothing you can do for them?'

'Nothing.'

'What, then, do you think I can do? Is it that you want to go back ? '

'We have come to see you because there is something in Kahore which we would much like to have here.'

'I see.' Biggles' voice was soft with enlightenment. 'What is this object
? '

'You would call it a statue, an idol; but to us it is Astana, the god of

our ancestors. It is of ivory, very old, very beautiful. You see, many Kahorans, driven from their homes, have fled to India. Some have even come here in ships. Me and my cousin we think of making a small temple here in which our people may not only worship in their own way but talk of plans for the liberation of Kahore, as many countries did in the war.

But of what use is an empty temple? Our visible god, Astana, is necessary to hold the people together.

Besides, it would be tragic if vandals despoiled this great work of art.'

'Quite so,' agreed Biggles. 'Has this statue any value apart from its religious significance?'

Again the Prince hesitated for an almost imperceptible moment, which was not lost on those watching him. 'No,' he answered.

'Good,' resumed Biggles. 'Where exactly is this statue?' 'In the temple at Pelanghur, the religious centre of Kahore.'

'But you have said the country has been overrun. How do you know that what you hope to prevent hasn't already happened ? '

'The god is hidden in a secret vault, known only to myself, my cousin, and the high priests, who would never reveal it, even under torture.'

'Why didn't you bring it with you when you left?

'Circumstances made it impossible. To escape with our lives, through hundreds of miles of jungle, even unencumbered, was a desperate adventure.'

'Now you want to fetch it so you come to me. Why ? '

'To carry the god overland would be impossible. Only an aeroplane could reach the temple. We are told that you specialize in such enterprises.'

'What sort of size, and weight, has this piece of ivory?' 'It is a sitting figure the size of life, so naturally it is very heavy.'

'Your plan is that we fly to the temple and bring the god home with us ?

,

'Exactly.'

'You realize that such a project would cost a good deal of money ? '

'Of course. We have money.'

'You'll need a lot,' advised Biggles. 'You haven't, I trust, overlooked the official angle.'

For instance, if the statue was brought to this country it would have to be submitted to the Customs Officers for inspection and valuation.'

The Prince looked hard at Biggles. 'Would that be necessary ? '

Biggles frowned. 'It most certainly would,' he said shortly.

'I was only thinking,' explained the Prince quickly, 'that the religious nature of the god would exempt it from duty.'

'That would be for the authorities to decide. I wouldn't advise you to try to bring the statue in without declaring it. What is your objection to bringing it in openly?'

'It might lead to publicity which would not only be distasteful, but perhaps dangerous. If terrorists learned of it they might make reprisals on the people. They might send agents here to murder us, for while I live Kahore is still a sovereign state.'

'Quite so,' acknowledged Biggles. 'Now tell me this. Is there a possible landing ground near the temple?'

'There is quite a good airfield. It was the existence of it that suggested this plan.'

Biggles's eyebrows went up. 'An airfield ? '

'An Englishman named Hobbs made it, close to his bungalow. He was a superintendent of tea plantations and used a plane to fly round his district: also to fetch supplies from the coast.'

'What happened to him ? '

'I don't know. He probably suffered the fate of many planters in Malaya.'

'All right. Just now you spoke of money. What sort of fee had you in mind for this service ? '

'We thought two thousand pounds. One thousand to be paid at the start and the balance at the end.'

'The expenses would be heavy.'

'We would pay all expenses.'

Biggles nodded. 'That sounds generous. You would, I take it, accompany the expedition yourself?'

'Of course. Will you help us ? '

Biggles got up. 'I'd like a day to think about it. Come round at the same time to-morrow and I'll give you my decision. If I accept we'll fix the arrangements.'

'Thank you.' The visitors bowed. Biggles saw them to the front door, returned to the sitting-room, and looked in turn at the faces of his assistants. 'Don't all speak at once,' he said drily.

'Why didn't you tell those birds right away that there was nothing doing

? ' asked Algy Lacey.

'Because that would have ended the matter as far as we're concerned. Our visitors would have gone elsewhere and we should have lost touch with them. I don't know that I want that to happen.' Biggles smiled. 'Put my interest down to an uncontrollable sense of curiosity.'

'Does that mean you're thinking seriously of going on this jaunt, old boy

? ' inquired Bertie Lissie, polishing his monocle briskly.

'You heard what I told them. I'd like to think about it. I meant that, because there are several angles to this business that strike me as queer.'

'I could see you didn't like those fellows,' put in Ginger.

'So far there's nothing to like or dislike about them — aside from the fact that they're both drug addicts. Opium smokers, probably. Their eyes give them away. I own I'm a bit prejudiced against the Prince because he has obviously ratted on his people by bolting and leaving them to carry the can without a leader. The country has, as we know from the newspapers, boiled over, leaving the terrorists on top. I don't doubt that the ivory god is there, and I suspect it's worth a substantial sum of money. I know the Prince said it had no great intrinsic value but I find that hard to believe. If it has no value outside religion why is he so anxious to get hold of it? That, to me, was a weak point in his story.

I also have doubts as to the Prince's title to the statue, and the use to

which he intends to put it.

The story of bringing it here for refugee Kahorans sounded thin to me. If he thought so much of them why did he leave them in the cart? Another thing I don't like was his hint of dodging Customs. Of course, that doesn't make him crooked, but it suggests he isn't quite as straight as he might be.'

'Two thousand plus expenses was a fair enough offer for the job, old lad,' opined Bertie.

'It was too much,' averred Biggles bluntly. 'I've learned that when people offer more for a job than it's worth they may have ideas about not paying at all.'

'We could demand to see the colour of his cash before the start.'

Ginger stepped in. 'What puzzles me is, if this pair aren't on the level why did they come to you? They must know you're a police officer.'

'You've got something there,' agreed Biggles. 'Maybe they thought they could buy me.'

That sort of thing is common in the East. Or perhaps they thought we had facilities denied to ordinary civil pilots — which in fact we have. But the Oriental mind is apt to weave in intricate circles so let's not waste time guessing.' He got up.

'Where are you going ? ' asked Algy.

'Back to the Yard to ask the Air Commodore what he thinks about it, and dig out all the gen available on Kahore and its ruling prince. See you later.'

It was past dinner time when he returned. 'I did better than I expected,'

he announced, as he pulled up a chair to the table. 'It seems that Prince Yuan Sukang is the King of Kahore, and from all accounts is a pretty decent fellow: but the Foreign Office was under the impression that he'd been bumped off. He and his brother did have an English tutor, and there was a planter in the country named Hobbs. Nothing has been heard of him since the trouble started. That part of the story seems to add up pretty well. What puzzled the Foreign Office was how the Prince got into this country without them knowing about it, and how he got money through the Currency Control without being spotted.'

'In plain English, old boy, they think the thing smells fishy,' prompted Bertie.

Biggles smiled faintly. 'They have an idea that the aroma isn't pure lavender water.'

'What's the upshot of it ? ' asked Algy, impatiently.

'The upshot is, the Chief is curious, and so is the Foreign Office. We've to follow the thing up to see where it ends.

For the job, which has now become an official enquiry, we may use government aircraft.'

'What about the two thousand quidlets ? ' inquired Bertie.

'I'm afraid we shall have to hand them over,' answered Biggles sadly.

'After dinner we'll have a look at the map to see just where we're going.

The monsoon will be over so the weather should be all right. If we go I think you'd better put guns in your pockets. We may need them.'

At five thousand feet the old police Wellington droned its way over the vast jungles of Upper Burma towards its remote objective. From the second pilot's seat Ginger regarded the unbroken green panorama without enthusiasm. Algy occupied the navigator's compartment,

although his job had really ended when they struck the tributary of the Mekong River, on the banks of which the village, with its temple, was situated. Bertie sat in the cabin with Prince Yuan and his compatriot.

A week had elapsed since Biggles had accepted the assignment. The interval had been straightforward routine. The aircraft had flown to the East stopping only for fuel, topping up its tanks for the last time at Dum-Dum aerodrome, Calcutta. The weather had been good all the way, and still remained fine, so the only hazard had been that of a forced landing over the last leg of the journey, where such an event must have had disastrous consequences. The real danger would come when the machine was on the ground, waiting while the idol was fetched from the temple, should terrorists be in the vicinity.

This risk was unavoidable. Biggles was not entirely happy about the alleged landing facilities, for he had only the Prince's word that an airstrip was there, and had not become overgrown.

There had been a slightly embarrassing moment at the outset. Right up to the time of taking off not a word had been said about money; wherefore Biggles, before getting into the machine, had turned to the Prince and asked him if he hadn't forgotten something.

The Prince looked surprised and said no. Biggles then reminded him that according to the contract there was a little matter of a thousand pounds to be handed over. The Prince, full of apologies, with a smile which to Ginger looked forced, had thereupon given him a bundle of notes, which, being bulky, and as the engines were running, he stowed in a locker. The matter was not referred to again, but the incident, trifling though it was, did nothing to inspire confidence in the passengers.

The plan outlined by Biggles was simple. The aircraft, safely down, would taxi to the far end of the airstrip and then turn ready for a quick take-off should danger threaten. It was supposed that if terrorists were about they would by that time have shown themselves.

All being well, Biggles, Bertie, Ginger and Mr. Kling would set off for

the temple, no great distance, leaving Algy and the Prince with the machine. It didn't matter which of the Kahorans acted as guide to the secret vault since both knew the entrance; but Biggles felt that one of them should be with each party in case natives were encountered.

Conversation would then be possible. This was merely a precautionary measure to prevent trouble for the white men should local people intercept them. The idol would be wrapped in canvas and carried in slings brought for the purpose. With four of them to take the weight the manhandling of the idol

to the aircraft should not be difficult. As soon as the idol was on board they would start for home. The whole operation, it was estimated, should not take more than an hour.

The bend of the river, exactly as the Prince had described it, came into view, with the burnt-out village on one bank. Close by, rising above the trees, were the twin pagoda-like towers of the temple, with the usual upturned eaves and abundance of carved figures.

The landing ground, too, was plain to see, for apart from some overgrown paddy fields near the village it was the only open area for miles. Ginger regarded it dubiously. The herbage looked lush, and secondary growth was already advancing from the jungle: but the stuff, he thought, was not yet stiff enough to upset them.

Biggles went down to twenty feet to have a close look at it. Apparently he was of the same opinion, for having made a circuit he put the Wellington down on what turned out to be quite a good surface. He taxied right on, leaving a track of flattened grass, to the boundary, and then turned into position for a quick take-off.

When, after waiting five minutes, no one had appeared, he switched off.

Another quarter of an hour passed, crew and passengers watching the fringe of the jungle anxiously.

'Okay,' said Biggles. 'Let's go.'

With canvas and slings over their shoulders the transport party moved off, Mr. Kling leading, leaving Algy and the Prince in charge of the aircraft. In the event of trouble a gunshot would be the signal to rally on the machine.

Jungle travel was nothing new to Ginger, who brought up the rear. The heat was oppressive, sultry and sticky. The air was heavy with the stench of rotting vegetation.

The green world through which they moved was the usual mixture of beauty and horror.

From the mush underfoot sprang graceful tree-ferns, groping lianas and creepers with monstrous, bloated leaves. From the trunks of trees, both living and dead, hung sprays of orchids. From overhanging branches leeches launched themselves on the invaders.

Sometimes a butterfly or moth of vivid colouring would cross their path.

But with these things Ginger was not concerned. He had seen them before.

His idea was to get through it, and out of it, as quickly as possible. He kept a watchful eye open for snakes.

In actual fact the ordeal did not last long. The forest gave way reluctantly to an open space of some size, and there, in the middle of it, stood the temple, obviously a building of great age, judging from the way the carving had weathered. Mr. Kling strode on towards it, clearly determined to get the business finished without loss of time. But as they drew nearer Ginger dropped back for a longer look at a structure which, he imagined, few white men had seen.

Upon such minor details does so much often depend. Had Ginger not stopped

— but he did, so speculation as to what might otherwise have happened is futile.

He noted the door by which the others had entered the temple, and was about to hurry after them when a hoarse voice hailed him in English:

'Hi! Wait a minute!'

Looking in the direction from which the sound had come he was amazed to see a man, a white man, gaunt, bearded and in tattered tropical kit, jump from a window and run towards him.

Ginger waited. 'Who are you?' he queried crisply, although he already had a suspicion.

'Hobbs is the name. Who are you, and what in thunder are you doing here?'

'I've come with some friends to fetch something from the temple. We've an aircraft on the strip. If you want to go home—'

'Hold hard,' broke in Hobbs. 'Who brought you here ? ' 'Prince Yuan—'

'He's dead. I saw his brother shoot him in cold blood. He was responsible for the mess here. He tried to get me, too, the dirty rat.'

'Has this brother got a little scar on his chin ? ' 'Yes – why?'

'He's calling himself the Prince. He's in our aircraft.'

'Then keep a gun handy, for a worse thug never lived. He was Prime Minister here, but that wasn't enough. He wanted to be King, so he plugged his brother in the back. But he started something he couldn't stop and had to bolt. He pinched my Moth and took his crooked pal, Kling, with him.'

Ginger looked shocked. 'Do you mean he can fly?' 'Sure he can fly. Learnt to fly in England. He was educated there.'

Ginger began to see daylight. It was clear now how the man calling himself Prince Yuan had got into England. 'He seems to have plenty of money,' he observed.

'Not he. He rifled the treasury but there was mighty little in it. What's he come back for, anyway?'

'An ivory idol.'

'I might have guessed.'

'He said it had no intrinsic value.'

'He always was a liar. The eyes of that idol are rubies the size of bantams' eggs.'

Ginger caught his breath. He had suspected a plot, but nothing like this.

'Kling has just gone into the temple with my friends to get the idol.'

'If he sees me he'll know the game's up, so watch out for trouble. I wonder what's inside the idol.'

'Inside it ? '

It's hollow – bound to be. Built up of pieces. No elephant ever grew a tusk that size. It's a masterpiece. I haven't lived here all my life without learning a few things about it.

Years ago it was human sacrifices they put inside, but—'

'Never mind that now,' interrupted Ginger urgently. 'I must warn my

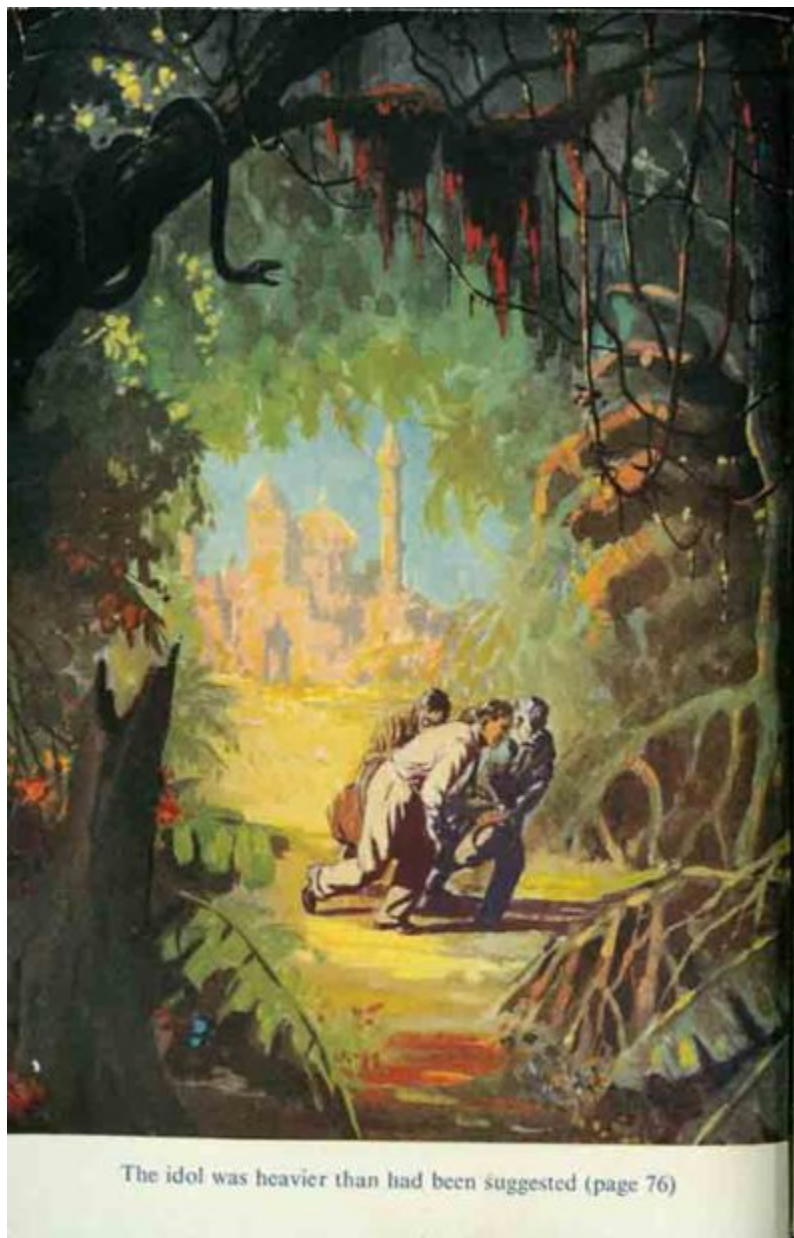
chief. Make for the landing ground, and when I come back watch for signals. You're coming home with us, so we look like having a show-down on the spot.'

'Suits me,' grunted Hobbs, and strode towards the jungle.

Ginger ran on, to meet the others just coming out with the idol swathed in canvas.

'What are you playing at ? ' shouted Biggles angrily. 'I didn't bring you along to watch.

Lend a hand. This thing weighs half a ton.'



The idol was heavier than had been suggested (page 76)

'Then put it down and have a breather,' answered Ginger meaningly, catching his eye. '

Come over here. I want to speak to you.'

Biggles walked over to where Ginger stood waiting. 'What goes on ? '

he asked quietly.

'Hold your hat,' Ginger told him grimly. 'You've some shocks coming. Our precious prince is an impostor. and Kling murdered Prince Yuan and touched off the revolution.

They rifled the treasury, tried to kill Hobbs, and pinched his Moth to make a get-away. That skunk in the Wellington can fly. Think that over.'

Biggles looked shaken. Then his face set in hard lines. 'Who told you this ? '

'I've seen Hobbs.'

'Where is he?'

'On the edge of the airfield waiting for a signal from us.' 'Let's get along,' said Biggles tersely. 'I'll think this over on the way.'

They rejoined the others, and taking up the load continued on to the airfield. Not a word was spoken. Sweat streamed from their faces, for the idol was heavier than had been suggested.

On arriving at the aircraft, which stood as they had left it, the two occupants got down to greet them. As the canvas-wrapped idol was lowered gently to the ground in its natural sitting position the cover slid off, revealing a flat face smiling an inscrutable smile, a round body and hands resting on knees. The eye sockets were empty holes.

'Let's get it on board and away,' said Kling sharply. 'This place is dangerous.'

Biggles took a pace back. His hand went casually into a side pocket.

'Just a minute,' he said. 'We're taking an extra passenger with us.'

The man who had called himself Prince Yuan started. 'A passenger! Who is he?'

'Fellow named Hobbs,' answered Biggles evenly. 'You told us about him.

Remember?'

Ginger could feel the atmosphere stiffening. He raised a hand, beckoning, then put it back in his pocket. Hobbs emerged from the jungle and walked forward. 'So he stayed here,' said the Prince in a thin, hard voice.

'He had to, since you stole his machine,' returned Biggles calmly.

Hobbs came up, his eyes glinting dangerously as they went from one schemer to the other. They switched to the idol and then back. 'Been busy with your knife as usual, I see,' he sneered.

'Take it easy, Hobbs,' said Biggles, quietly.

'Thanks to these two beauties I've been taking it easy long enough,' rasped Hobbs. '

Having set the country afire they've the brass face to come back and lift the one holy thing left in this unholy country. What's inside it, I wonder ? ' Before anyone could stop him he had seized the right arm of the idol and raised it high. Instantly a door in the back flew open disclosing a filling of what appeared to be brown bricks, some of which fell out. A peel of mirthless laughter broke from his lips. 'Dope,' he cried. 'I ought to have guessed it. Enough opium to dope—'

He jumped sideways as the 'Prince' whipped out an automatic. Two shots crashed as one.

The Prince crumpled from the knees and slumped forward on his face. Kling was running for the jungle, but Hobbs turned the smoking

muzzle of his revolver on him and fired three shots. The third found its mark. Kling pitched forward and lay still.

'You shouldn't have done that, Hobbs,' snapped Biggles.

'That's where you're wrong,' answered Hobbs casually, pocketing his gun.

'They had it coming. Never mind what they tried to do to me, Prince Yuan was a fine man, and a particular friend of mine. This is my best day's work for a long time. You can do what you like about it now as far as I'm concerned.'

There was silence while Biggles examined the fallen men.

Returning, he announced that both were dead. 'I wonder what they intended to do,' he muttered.

'I'll tell you,' answered Hobbs. 'If you'd got into that plane you'd never have come out of it alive. You'd have been shot dead without knowing anything about it. Your passenger would have taken over the controls and gone to some place he had in mind with enough dope and wealth to last him the rest of his life.'

'Wealth?' queried Biggles.

'Were you with Kling when he entered the vault?'

'No. He went in alone to confirm the thing was still there.'

Hobbs smiled cynically. 'I'll show you what he went in for.' Walking over to Kling he went through his pockets. Returning, he handed to Biggles two enormous rubies.

reckon that when a man sinks low enough to poke out the eyes of his god he can't go much lower,' he remarked coldly.

'What beats me is this,' said Biggles. If the fellow was a pilot why did he come to me?'

'He wanted a plane.'

'He could have got one. He'd plenty of money.' 'Who says so.'

'He paid me a thousand pounds at the start.'

'In notes?'

'Yes.'

'Have you looked at them?'

'No.'

'You'd better.'

Biggles fetched the wad, and looking chagrined peeled a single ten pound note from a mass of tissue paper. 'So that was why he waited until the engines were ticking over before he coughed up. He gambled I wouldn't stop to count it.'

'What are you going to do with this ? ' Hobbs inclined his head towards the idol.

'Leave it where it is. I'm taking no chances by putting it back in the temple.'

'If the natives caught you with it they'd skin you alive.'

'That's what I was thinking. No doubt they'll find it and put it back.'

'We'll take the dope with us and drop it in the jungle as we go home.'

'What about the rubies ? '

'They'll be safe in the Bank of England until a rightful authority claims them. No use leaving them lying about loose here. Let's get along. The sooner I'm out of this the more comfortable I shall be.'

Ten minutes later the Wellington was in the air on a course for home. On the abandoned airfield the ivory god, still smiling inscrutably, stared at the jungle with sightless eyes.

BIGGLES BUYS A WATCH

Detective Air-Inspector Bigglesworth, walking briskly down the Strand towards his office at Scotland Yard, pulled up as a hand fell on his arm.

Turning, his eyes opened wide and a smile parted his lips as his gaze fell on a man resplendent in a purple and gold uniform. 'Well, well,' he exclaimed. 'If it isn't Flight-Sergeant Crane. Nice to see you again after all this time. How's life treating you, Flight-Sergeant ? '

'Oh, not so bad, sir,' was the cheerful reply. 'Seems a long while since we sweated together under those bloomin' palms in North Africa.'

'It does indeed,' answered Biggles. 'I see you're out of the Service.'

What are you doing now? That's some nice bright plumage you're wearing.'

The ex-airman jerked a thumb. 'I'm doorkeeper at the big stores down the road.'

After chatting for a few minutes about old times Biggles was about to walk on when the N.C.O. said: 'Oh, by the way, sir, I suppose you don't happen to want to buy a watch?'

Biggles' face expressed surprise. 'Not particularly. Why? Have you got more than you want?'

Crane smiled sadly. 'A smart guy worked one on me the other day.' As the airman spoke he unstrapped from his wrist a nice-looking watch, obviously new. 'It's a good job,' he declared. 'Keeps right time, and all that, but I can't afford watches at five pounds a go.'

You can have it for what it cost me.'

Biggles examined the watch. 'It looks all right.'

'You couldn't buy it for a fiver at the shop,' asserted the Flight-Sergeant.

'How did you get it ? '

'Well, sir, it was like this,' explained Crane. 'About a month ago, one Saturday evening just before closing time, I was on my job when who should come along but McDew - you remember, that flashy, red-headed corporal rigger at Karga Oasis in the war? You had him posted as a no-use scrounger.'

Biggles nodded. 'I remember the fellow. Bad type.'

'Well, he told me the tale. Just got to London and had his pocket picked, he said. The banks were shut of course, and there he was, no pals and nothing to live on till Monday morning. Would I lend him a flyer? I ses not likely. So he ses I'll leave you my watch for security. It cost ten pounds so you're safe. I'll be back for it on Monday, don't you worry.'

I ses fair enough. I give him the fiver and he gives me the watch. Did he come back for it on Monday? No. Nor any other day. After about a week I ses to myself, you fool, you let him sell you a watch. It's a good watch, mind you, but I don't happen to want it.'

Biggles laughed. 'He took you to the cleaners all right. Still, I won't see

you stuck with it.

'I'll have it.' He paid over the money, and after warning Crane to be more careful went on his way.

Passing a jeweller's shop an idea struck him. He went in and put the watch on the counter. 'Would you mind telling me how much that watch would cost, new ? ' he asked.

The jeweller examined the watch. 'It would cost between ten and twelve pounds, according to the class of shop,' he stated.

'How much would you give me for it ? ' asked Biggles.

The man picked up the watch. 'I won't keep you long,' he said, and retired to a back room. It was some minutes before he returned. 'Sorry,'

he said stiffly, 'I wouldn't touch that watch with a barge pole.'

Biggles stared. 'What's the matter with it ? '

'You know what's the matter with it,' sneered the shopkeeper.

A hand closed like a vice on Biggles' arm. 'Come on,' said a brittle voice.

Turning, Biggles met the accusing gaze of Inspector Gaskin, of C

Division. Recognition was mutual. The inspector burst out laughing, presumably at the expression on Biggles's face. 'That's a good 'un,' he declared. 'Fancy me being fetched out to pick you up.'

Biggles looked slightly dazed. 'Fetched out? Who fetched you out ? '

The inspector indicated the jeweller with a jerk of his head. 'While he

kept you waiting he tipped me off on the phone. I was in such a hurry to get here in my car I was nearly picked up myself for dangerous driving. I thought I'd at last got my hands on a chap we'

ve been looking for for some time.'

'What's wrong with the watch?' inquired Biggles. 'Plenty,' answered the inspector. 'If you'

re going to the Yard I'll give you a lift.'

Ten minutes later, in his office, he was explaining. 'That watch,' said the detective, tapping the instrument, 'in the country where it was made could be bought whole sale for about thirty bob. By the time it had paid export duty, transport, import duty and purchase tax, wholesaler's and retailer's profits, it would cost, over here, not less than ten pounds.

So if all these expenses could be avoided a fellow handling the watch could make a nice profit on it. By making three or four pounds a time on them, a thousand watches of that sort would net a lot of money.'

Biggles nodded. 'I get it. So that watch was smuggled in ? '

'That's it. Of course, there is a snag in this get-richquick game.'

'What is it ? '

'You couldn't sell that watch in this country, not to a respectable shop, because, by arrangement with the manufacturers, all watches imported under official licence have to carry a special mark. Shopkeepers know where to look for it. No mark means that the watch was smuggled into this country from abroad.'

Biggles lit a cigarette. 'How would that affect an innocent person, over here, caught with such a watch?'

The inspector shrugged. 'Well, no one would be likely to know about it unless he tried to sell it, as you did. The trouble would arise if he went abroad. Coming back the Customs officers would assume that the chap had bought the watch abroad and was trying to smuggle it in; in which case it might be a police court job, with a fine and treble duty to pay at the end of it.'

'That's a bit hard.'

'Not at all. That couldn't happen to anyone buying a watch at a respectable shop. People who buy things nowadays from street traders they don't know are asking for trouble.'

'Well, well,' sighed Biggles, and turned to the door.

'Here, just a minute,' requested the inspector. 'Where did you get that watch? Don't tell me that a sharper caught you?'

Biggles grinned. 'No,' he said softly. 'I'm going to catch him.'

He found Air-Constable 'Ginger' Hebblethwaite at the office, the others being on duty in the Operations Room at the airfield.

'What have you been doing?' queried Ginger.

'Buying a watch,' replied Biggles whimsically. 'I want you to buy me some more like it,'

he went on, showing his purchase. 'Take some money out of the safe, go round the big stores, clubs and hotels, get in touch with the hall porters and find out if any of them have a watch to sell. Don't pay more than five pounds. In each case get a description of the man from whom the fellow bought the watch.'

Ginger looked astonished, as well he might. 'What's wrong with going to a shop if you want a watch ? '

'They're not the sort I'm looking for.'

'Since when did hall porters start to sell watches ? ' inquired Ginger cynically.

'That, my lad, is what I want you to find out,' Biggles told him. 'Get cracking.'

In an hour Ginger was back. With exaggerated deliberation he laid five watches on Biggles's desk, in each case naming the hotel where it had been bought. 'Anyone would think it had been raining watches,' he remarked. 'Everyone in London seems to have a watch to sell. One fellow, who lives at Brighton, told me it's the same down there. Where on earth have they all come from ? '

'That's the little problem we're going to solve,' answered Biggles, smiling. 'Get Marcel Brissac, at the Paris office of the International Police Commission, on the phone.'

Ginger put through the call and presently handed the receiver to Biggles.

'Marcel at the other end,' he announced.

'Hello, Marcel!' called Biggles. 'Nice to hear your voice again. No — no.

I'm only interested in watches to-day.'

What the French detective said Ginger could not hear, of course; but Biggles's smile grew broader until, by the time he rang off, he was laughing. 'Poor old Marcel is in a flap,' he told Ginger. 'He says there are enough smuggled watches in France for everyone to wear one round each wrist and ankle and still leave plenty over. He says they're being flown into the country at night. The machine slips in and out before he can catch up with it. To guard every field in France would need the entire French Army.'

'It's hard to see how that sort of thing can be stopped,' said Ginger moodily. 'I imagine the same pilot is bringing the stuff into this country, too.'

'No doubt. If we can catch him it should put an end to the traffic. What happens is plain enough to see. The machine slips across the coast and hands the watches to an agent. The agent daren't try to sell them to the shops. It would be difficult to sell them direct to the public because not everyone wants a watch: so the trick is to get a loan on a watch and then forget to go back for it. It comes to the same thing as selling it, except that the man who gets the watch doesn't realize for some time that he's bought it. Well, I know the agent in this country. In passing off a watch to an old comrade he may have been just a bit too smart.'

Ginger looked astonished. 'You know the agent? All I could learn was, the fellow is a slick-looking type with red hair, who speaks with a slight Scotch accent.'

Biggles nodded. 'That's the man. Do you remember a tricky corporal rigger in North Africa named McDew — Roderick McDew ? I have a clear recollection of him because he's that rare thing, a dishonest Scot.'

remember him,' said Ginger.

'All right. Go round to the Air Ministry and ask them to get you his home address from R.A.F. Records. While you're there, go and see Doyle, of Air Intelligence, and ask him if any radar stations have picked up an unidentified aircraft crossing the coast, and if so, where and when.'

'Good enough.' Ginger went off.

When he returned, two hours later, he was able to provide the answers to Biggles's questions. The home address of the ex-corporal was Balburnie, near Forres, Scotland, where his father was a crofter. There had been several cases of unidentified aircraft crossing the coast. These had been widely scattered except at one point. This was on the south side of the Moray Firth, where, for three consecutive months, on the occasion of the full moon, a slow-moving aircraft had

come in from the North Sea, and after a short while, returned to the Continent.

'Splendid,' acknowledged Biggles. 'It shouldn't take us long to get this business buttoned up. The aircraft comes in over Moray, which is a county with plenty of wide open spaces.

That can hardly be coincidence. We'll soon see. Let's go up and have a look round. Ring the Ops room and tell Algy to get the Proctor topped up.

I'd like a weather report on North East Scotland. We'll park at Inverness Airport, Dalcross, which is nice and handy.

Get out the six inch Ordnance sheets of the Forres area. We may need them.'

Ginger was looking at the calendar. 'The moon will be full on Thursday.

Rises at ten o'

clock.'

'Then we shouldn't have long to wait,' averred Biggles.

And so it came about that Thursday morning found Ginger, with Biggles at the wheel of a hired car, cruising along one of the few, narrow roads, that wind for many lonely miles across the rolling heather-clad hills between the Moray Firth and Speyside. On this particular road was the croft known as Balburnie.

An air reconnaissance on the previous day had yielded little of interest.

For the most part the ground was a waste of heather, purple and brown with the sombre tints of autumn, wild and desolate in the

extreme. Even crofts, with their tiny patches of cultivated ground, were few and far between. An occasional lochan, remote and mysterious, reflected the unbroken blue of the sky. Of country flat enough to permit the landing of an aircraft, there was little; and even that, as Biggles observed, would have to be surveyed from ground level before the risk was taken, for such places were often bogs.

'This must be Balburnie,' said Biggles presently as a small, stone-built dwelling appeared ahead. The eternal heather ran right to its walls, but there was a small field of oats on one side and some potatoes on the other. Among these a man was digging, with some scraggy-looking chickens scratching the upturned earth. He looked up, resting on his fork, as the visitors approached, when it could be observed that he was of late middle age, with the weary expression so often seen on the faces of those who spend their lives at war with nature in its hardest mood.

'You'll be Mr. McDew, I think ? ' greeted Biggles.

'Aye,' acknowledged the man.

'You've a son in the Air Force, I believe ? '

'Not now. He was.'

'I served with him at one time, name of Bigglesworth,' went on Biggles.

'Happening to be passing I thought I'd look in to see how he was getting on.'

'He's doing fine,' was the reply. 'He's no here, though. He's awa' South.'

'Comes to see you sometimes, I hope?' prompted Biggles.

'Oh, aye. Comes up regular every month. Be up to-night, likely. Ses the

heather calls him back.'

'Not much for him to do here?'

'Och, he likes walking fine. He walks half the night.' 'Just to be in the heather ? '

'Aye. Soon as he's here, off he goes to the Dubh Chtais.'

'It's a long way to come, just to walk on the heather, train fares being what they are,' murmured Biggles.

'No trains for Rod,' said the old man. 'He's got a car of his own. Smart lad, is Rod.'

'He always was smart,' agreed Biggles, without enthusiasm. 'Well, I won't stop you working. I thought I'd just look in. It's a fine day.'

'Aye, a grand dey.'

Biggles went back to the car and drove on. 'You know, this sort of business makes me sick,' he told Ginger bitterly. 'That old fellow has spent his life working. I'll warrant he's as straight as a gun barrel; yet here's his son, who ought to be helping him, on the high road to jail. Well, the sooner he gets there the better. It may teach him sense.

For the game he's playing he'll get six months. If he gets away with it he'll try something more ambitious, and when he's caught, go down for five years. What we— ! ' He swung on to the verge to avoid a racy-looking sports car that came tearing down the road at a speed that could not have been necessary. 'Get the number,' he snapped.

'I've got it,' said Ginger. 'That was McDew. I recognized him.'

'Alone? '

'Yes.'

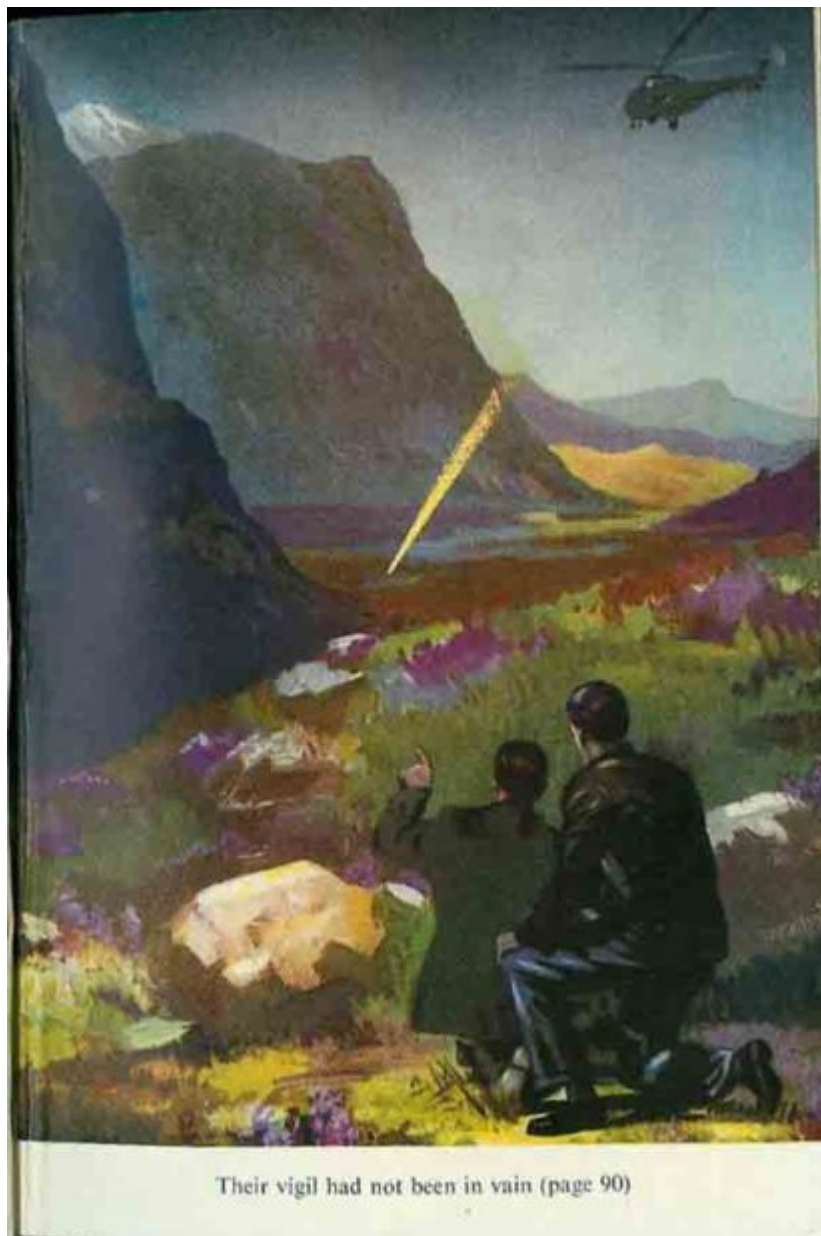
'Come for some more watches,' murmured Biggles. 'To-night must be the night. We'd better go back a different way – we don't want him to see us.'

Look up this place Dubh Chtais on the map. I expect it'll be a fair walk across the moor.'

Ginger unrolled the map. 'Here we are,' he said, pointing. 'Right in the middle of nowhere. No tracks, nothing. Some flat ground, judging from the contours.'

'We'll take a compass bearing on it,' asserted Biggles. 'We'd better start early, too. From what I saw from up topsides this is no place to get lost.'

He drove on.



At ten o'clock the moon crept up over the distant hills to reveal a scene that was heart-chilling in its utter loneliness. On all sides the moor rolled away to rounded contours, silent, without movement, without a spark of light anywhere. Only in one place was the ground level, and that for a short distance, where the heather gave way to yellow star-grass. On one side of it ran the banks of black peat that gave the place its local name. In the cover thus provided Biggles and Ginger sat gazing into the brooding gloom, waiting, watching.

For an hour nothing happened. Then a slight sound made Ginger stiffen.

But it was only a roe deer. Near them it stopped to stare back in the direction whence it had come; then it must have caught their taint, for it went off at a gallop.

'Quiet,' breathed Biggles. 'Someone must have disturbed that beast.'

Soon afterwards a shadowy figure appeared, walking slowly towards the middle of the level area, where presently it merged again into the darkness.

Another wait followed, and then softly through the still air came the sound that told Ginger that their vigil had not been in vain. It was the drone of an aircraft, either distant or flying high. A light appeared on the plain. Three times a torch was flashed upwards.

Immediately the drone of the aircraft died, to be followed presently by a curious swishing sound that puzzled Ginger until Biggles whispered, 'Helicopter.'

The light on the plain continued to flash at intervals as the aircraft drew nearer. In making its landing the machine passed low over the heads of the watchers, to settle with hardly any forward speed fifty yards farther on.

'Come on,' said Biggles softly. 'This is our cue. If the pilot tries to get off shoot at the blades of his rotor.' They walked forward briskly, and so engrossed were the pilot and his accomplice that they were within speaking distance before they were noticed.

McDew, carrying a bag, promptly bolted. Biggles called him by name, telling him that running would do him no good. However, McDew ran on and was soon lost to sight in the darkness.

Meanwhile, Ginger was occupied with the helicopter. The pilot had jumped into his seat and revved up his engine; but Ginger's automatic spat, and at the third shot splinters flew as the bullet shattered one of the wooden rotor blades. After that there could be no escape by air. Indeed, the pilot had to throttle back, for the racing engine was threatening to tear itself off its bearers.

'Come out of that,' ordered Biggles curtly. 'You can't get away. Don't try anything silly.'

'We're armed.'

The engine died, and a man got down, slowly, demanding in a loud voice, with a foreign accent, to be told the meaning of the outrage.

'Quit bluffing,' said Biggles grimly. 'We know your game. You're through with it.'

Ginger snapped handcuffs on the man's wrists.

'Start walking,' ordered Biggles. 'We've a long way to go.'

'I have nothing in my machine — nothing ! ' cried the prisoner hysterically. 'What have I done? I bring nothing. Look and see.'

'Where are the watches ? ' inquired Biggles.

'Watches? I have no watches. Look for yourself.'

'In that case they must be in the bag your friend was carrying,' said Biggles evenly. 'He will, no doubt, try to get to London with them. Well, he won't get far. The number of his car is known, and police are waiting for it

on every road leading south. It looks as if they'll catch him with more watches than he will need for some time - the sort of watches that aren't easy to explain.'

As a matter of fact, that is just what happened. THE CASE OF

THE POISONED CROPS

want you to go to Africa,' Air Commodore Raymond, of the Special Air Section at Scotland Yard, told his chief operational pilot, Air Detective-Inspector Bigglesworth. '

There's been nothing about it in the papers yet, but the unrest among certain tribes on the borders of the Kikuyu country has taken a turn for the worse; and in view of what's happening there it isn't surprising.'

'Has this anything to do with Mau-Mau terrorism?'

'It could be - indirectly. The scheme is too ingenious, and the operation of it too technical, for the average native mind. But whoever is behind it is no friend of ours, and is obviously trying to aggravate the Mau-Mau trouble by spreading it to other districts.'

'What exactly is happening ? '

'Someone is now hitting the wretched native on his most vulnerable spot -

his food supply. Not only are his crops being destroyed but the very ground on which they grow is being reduced to a wilderness. The government of course will be blamed for this by everyone who happens not to like us. It's a queer business, and may hook up with a case of pilfering that occurred not long ago. Help yourself to a cigarette and I'll tell you about it.

'As you know,' continued the Air Commodore, 'one of the plagues of Africa is the locust, which in a few hours can turn a verdant landscape into a howling desert. The pest has to a certain extent been checked, but never eradicated, by the use of flame guns on the ground and the spraying of poison on the swarms from the air. It was realized that what really was needed was an insecticide of sufficient strength to kill the pests even though it was discharged from a spray gun at a considerable altitude.

This would enable a single machine to deal quickly with a big swarm, which might cover some hundreds of square miles. One of the big chemical firms undertook the job, and soon produced the very thing that was needed. But there was a snag. The stuff, which was named Vegicide, certainly killed the locusts, but it also killed everything else, by which I mean the vegetation. In fact, it poisoned the ground, so that nothing would grow in it for some time. However, this difficulty was not insuperable. The swarm could be sprayed from the air when it

was passing over ground already sterile, and as you know, there's plenty of that in North Central Africa. That would save the crops farther south. Twelve ten-gallon drums of Vegicide were therefore produced to give it a trial.

It was shipped to Nairobi via Mombasa. Now here is a point. Because the stuff was dangerous to handle on account of its poisonous properties, to say nothing of it being highly inflammable, to discourage anyone from tinkering with it the drums were painted red, with the label, "

Explosive. Stow away from engines." This may have defeated our object, for four drums were stolen from the dock at Mombasa, the thief supposing, perhaps, that the contents were alcohol, or methylated spirit, or something of that nature. Be that as it may, the real purpose of the stuff was soon discovered, and as it is now being used is doing far more harm than the locusts. It is destroying the natives' crops, presumably in the hope of starving them into a state of rebellion. The four drums that were taken would destroy an immense tract of ground. Worse, by analysing a sample, more could be produced.'

'Sounds nasty,' murmured Biggles. 'And you've no idea who's playing this dirty game?'

'None at all. But we now have what might turn out to be a clue that could put us on the track of those responsible. Shortly after the Vegicide was found to be missing, a curious message, sent out by an aircraft, came over the air. It was picked up by several stations.

A weak voice appealed to anyone British to go to the airfield at Klookerstein. The voice became weaker and faded to silence. Klookerstein, by the way, is an old airstrip in North Central Africa, miles from anywhere. A plane was flown out but could discover nothing wrong.'

'Have you learned who sent the signal ? '

'No.'

'What's this airfield doing there, anyway ? '

'By a strange coincidence it's being used as an experimental base by people investigating methods of destroying the locust plague. The man in charge is an engineer named de Goot. He has with him a chemist, and a doctor named Frankl who has made a study of the migration of insects. The place is, in fact, on the edge of the locust belt. De Goot, apparently, is working on a power-driven spray gun, out of which he reckons to make a lot of money. He may be genuine, but this engineering job might, of course, be a cover for other activities. I don't overlook that. He has two old Moths which he probably bought cheaply.'

'Does he fly them himself?'

think so, but most of his flying has been done by a South African named Harley.'

'Felix Harley, by any chance ? '

'That's the man. Know him ? '

'I knew him in the war. Good chap. There's nothing phoney about him, anyhow. What had he to say ? '

'He couldn't say anything, for the simple reason he wasn't there. He's disappeared.'

'In what circumstances ? '

'According to de Goot he pinched the pay-roll and bolted, taking one of the planes - a Gipsy Moth, to be specific.'

Biggles shook his head. 'That doesn't sound like the man I knew.'

'The police, without evidence, could hardly call de Goot a liar.'

'I suppose not. Was a search made for Harley? He might have had a forced landing.'

The Air Commodore shrugged. 'I don't know about that.'

'He might have been the pilot who sent out that mysterious signal - since you say you haven't been able to find out who did.'

'The same thought struck me. That's why I think it would be a good thing if you went out and had a look round.'

'How far is this airfield from the district where the crops have been destroyed ? '

'About a hundred miles.'

'Have you any other gen about these people at Klookerstein ? '

'Practically none. De Goot, from all accounts, is a taciturn sort of fellow.'

'I'll go and have a look at him,' promised Biggles. 'If he doesn't like us he'll soon show it: and the man who is killing the natives' crops must hate us, for it's hard to see any other motive than to cause us more trouble in Africa than we have already. I'll get along.'

Two aircraft, a Proctor and an Auster, droned at a sober speed across the weary waste of Africa that lies northeast of Kenya. In the Proctor were Biggles and Ginger: in the Auster, Algy and Bertie. Both machines, modified for police work, were equipped with long range tanks and high frequency radio telephony. They were, in fact, two of the machines that had been used in the search for the fanatical negro who had called himself The Black Elephant.

Biggles's plan, if it could be called a plan, was to fly direct to Klookerstein in the Proctor and begin his enquiries there. If the people

were willing to co-operate, so well and good.

If they were not, then they would lay themselves open to suspicion. Algy and Bertie, in the slow-flying Auster, were to search the area for signs of the missing pilot Harley.

Biggles thought they had a reasonable chance of finding him, for if Harley had been sufficiently badly hurt to die or faint in his cockpit, assuming that it was he who had sent out the strange message, he could not have flown far from his base. As things turned out this suimise proved to be correct.

'All right. Carry on,' Biggles told Algy over the radio when they were within fifty miles of the objective. 'Concentrate on the eastern side.

Harley would head towards the nearest settlements, not away from them, if he was hurt. I'll pick you up later if you don't hear from me.'

The Auster turned away to begin its search. The Proctor went on, and a quarter of an hour later put down its wheels on the sun-dried grass of the Klookerstein airstrip, its arrival being watched by several men, both black and white, from the entrance of a canvas hangar that still showed the brown and green of war-time camouflage. Inside the hangar Ginger could just make out the shape of a Puss Moth. There were one or two other tents, smaller ones, and a native compound. A wind-stocking hung limply from a pole.

None of the watchers moved as the Proctor taxied up and its crew got down. They all stood watching, and from their attitudes Ginger sensed at once an atmosphere of guarded hostility — or, at least, it was clear that the Proctor was not welcome.

As he walked up, Biggles gave no indication that he was aware of anything unusual. Nor did his attitude change when he was greeted with a surly:

'If you're looking for petrol we'

ve none to spare.'

'As it happens I'm not looking for petrol,' answered Biggles evenly. 'I'm looking for a friend of mine named Harley.'

'He's gone,' was the curt reply.

'Do you know where he is ? '

'No, I wish I did. He took one of my machines, and the pay-roll.'

Biggles looked at the spokesman. 'Are you by any chance Mr. de Goot ? '

'General de Goot.'

'Sorry. You don't mind if we stretch our legs for a little while ? '

De Goot hesitated. 'Don't make it too long. We've just had word that a big locust swarm is heading south and we plan to intercept it. That's what we're here for.'

Ginger, his eyes active, strolled on a little way, ostensibly to get out of the glare of the sun, but really, as he had been instructed by Biggles, to note anything of interest. He did not fail to notice that he was followed by several spear-armed natives.

There were other items of interest, too. Conspicuous, so conspicuous that Biggles must have seen them, were several small areas of blackened grass, as if fires had been lighted on those particular spots. But there was no wood ash. Equally conspicuous were four black-painted drums. In the ordinary way he would have taken them for oil drums. The ground under each was black. Walking slowly past them he noticed places where they had been scratched, or knocked. Under the black the colour was red. This was all he really needed to know, for there was no doubt in his mind as to what the drums contained, or had contained.

On his way back his questing eyes spotted something else. Close by

was a tamarisk tree.

A scar showed white on the trunk. Something had struck it horizontally, tearing off a piece of bark. The only thing he could think of likely to make such a mark was a bullet.

He had seen bullet marks on trees before. It looked as if there had been shooting at Klookerstein. It was from about this spot, he decided, that Harley had made his attempt to escape.

Strolling back to rejoin Biggles he became aware that relations had disimproved, for he heard de Goot say: 'We want no interfering Britishers here.'

Replied Biggles calmly: 'We'll go when we're ready. I've come some way to find Harley.'

Why didn't you go and look for him yourself — or report him to the police?'

There was no answer to this question. It was evident that de Goot and his companions were impatient for them to go. No hospitality was offered. On the contrary, it was evident from the expressions on the faces of everyone that if departure was long delayed the sullen truce would break down.

Biggles no doubt realized this and decided to avoid open conflict, for he said, casually: '

Oh well, we'll get along,' and turned towards the Proctor. Ginger followed him, feeling more than slightly uncomfortable, half expecting to feel the impact of a spear, or a bullet, in his back. However, nothing of the sort happened, and the Proctor took off still watched by hostile eyes from the hangar.

As soon as they were in the air Ginger reported what he had seen.

'Good work,' complimented Biggles. 'I haven't the slightest doubt that these are the people we're looking for. I never saw a nastier-looking lot. An analysis of the contents of one of those drums would be all the evidence required to put them out of business; but we should have been asking for it had we tried to take one. There were too many of them. See if you can contact Algy.'

The Auster's call signal was soon picked up, and presently a red signal flare soared up into the air. Turning towards it they saw the machine on some open ground near an area of mixed trees and scrub. Algy told them it was safe to land, so Biggles went down and joined him. Even before they landed Ginger realized why the Auster had so soon been able to find the crashed Gipsy Moth, for leading to the scrub was a quarter of a mile of dead black grass.

'We've found him,' said Algy briefly. 'He died in the machine. He'd switched off, so it didn't catch fire. There are bullet holes in the airframe and fabric, and there's dry blood on the floor of the cockpit. He was shot all right.'

'From the air the crash looked to be burnt out!'

'He had a tank of Vegicide on board. The lead must have broken when he struck, and everything is dead for thirty yards round.'

'I'd better have a look. You stay here, Ginger.' Biggles pushed his way into the scrub.

When he came out his face was pale and his expression grim. 'A plain case of murder,' he said quietly. 'Two bullets - perhaps more - struck him.'

'They'll still be in the body. The ballistic experts will identify the gun that fired the shots and I think I know where we can find it.'

'Klookerstein ? '

'Where else? There's quite a bunch of them there, too many for us to handle alone, although they may not all know what's been going on.'

Poor Harley must have rumbled it.

No doubt he said what he thought and then tried to get away to report the matter. They must have shot him as he got into the machine, but they couldn't prevent him taking off.

He knew he'd never get to Nairobi so he broadcast a signal, switched off, and in trying to land, piled up. His signal was vague, but when you think about it what else could he say? He had no time for long explanations.

However, the word Klookerstein was enough.

Let's get back to Nairobi. This place needs cleaning up.' He walked over to the Proctor, and was about to get in when from no great distance came the roar of an aircraft, flying fast and low. A Puss Moth burst into view.

For a moment everyone stood still, staring, as the Puss suddenly lined up towards them.

'He's pulling out,' muttered Ginger.

Then, from below the machine, an oily black substance was squirted downwards.

'Look out!' shouted Biggles. 'Run.'

For a moment all was confusion. Biggles jumped into the cockpit. Ginger fell in behind him, but before he could get into his seat the Proctor was on the move, bumping tail-up over the ground, with the door still open, as it gathered speed on a course at right angles to the Puss Moth, which roared past behind them. 'What happened to the others ? ' rapped out Biggles. 'If that stuff was Vegicide, it's poison.'

Ginger, trying to see out, nearly fell out. A smoking trail marked the line of flight of the Moth. It passed close to the Auster. Algy and Bertie were under the trees, peering out. '

They're all right,' he told Biggles, with the Proctor slowing down.

'Where's the Puss ? '

Looking, Ginger saw the machine racing on, belching a hideous black cloud. At first he supposed this to be intentional, but a streamer of yellow flame made him catch his breath. 'He's on fire,' he yelled.

'Impossible.'

'But he is, I tell you.' Ginger's voice rose to a shrill crescendo. 'He's into the ground.

What a mess!'

Biggles turned the Proctor, taxied back a little way, stopped and jumped down. 'How on earth did that happen ? ' he cried in a voice of amazement, as he stared at the blazing wreck nearly a mile away.

'Don't ask me,' answered Ginger helplessly.

Algy and Bertie got into the Auster, and taxi-ing quickly across the tract of devastation, joined them. Mgy was looking shaken.

'How did he set himself on fire?' asked Biggles wonderingly.

'He didn't,' replied Algy shortly. 'I did it.'

'What are you talking about?' demanded Biggles. 'How could you do it ? '

'With this,' returned Algy simply, holding out his Very pistol. 'I had it loaded in case you didn't see my first flare. When I saw the Puss was going to drench us with that stuff I let drive a flare across his nose to

make him swerve. As you'd expect, at the rate he was travelling I was behind him. I'm sure I didn't hit him. That's what I don't understand.'

'The flare must have fired the Vegicide, and it caught up with him,' said Biggles thoughtfully. 'The Air Commodore said the stuff was highly inflammable.'

'Of course. I didn't think of that.'

'There's no question of getting near that crash,' asserted Biggles. 'The grass is on fire all round it and likely to spread. We'll get back to Nairobi and report it, and arrange for the rest of the gang to be picked up. They had only one machine left, and now that's gone, so they've no hope of getting away. Come on, let's get mobile.'

BIGGLES NETS A FISH

As soon as Biggles entered the office of his chief, Mr Commodore Raymond of the Special Air Section at Scotland Yard, he knew that something serious was under discussion. Major Charles, of Security Intelligence, whom he knew well, was there, and three other men, none of whom he recognized. One was an army colonel; another wore the uniform of an American major, and the third, an elderly man in civilian clothes, he judged to be a senior civil servant.

'Come in, Bigglesworth,' greeted the Air Commodore seriously. 'You and Major Charles need no introduction. This is Major Booth of the Inter-Zonal Security Section, Western Germany.' Turning to the civilian he went on: 'This is Professor Frail, head of the atomic sub-station at Heatherstone Moor, and' - indicating the last member of the group - 'this is Colonel Barclay, one of those responsible for the safety of the Harwell atomic pile and its satellite stations. As you will already have supposed we are having a spot of bother.'

You may be able to help us. Sit down and I'll run over the main points of the business.

The trouble started in Major Booth's department. No doubt he will

prompt me if I do not make things clear.'

'I guess I've brought a tough nut for you to crack,' the American told Biggles lugubriously, as they all sat down. 'Having been in the New York State police for nearly twenty years I reckoned I was pretty tough myself, but that was kid's stuff compared with this Iron Curtain racket.'

Biggles lit a cigarette and settled down to listen.

The Air Commodore began: 'The case opened with an accident, a fortunate one for us. It seems that the sector of Germany over which Major Booth has control is heavily wooded, and some of the local lads are rather given to poaching game. Being near the zonal demarcation line it must be a dangerous pastime, but apparently it goes on. One night recently a low-flying aircraft must have mistaken the poachers' torches for signal lights on the other side of the frontier, for it dropped a small packet which was picked up by two German youths, who, with commendable common sense, and perhaps hoping for a reward, took it to Major Booth's headquarters.'

'Sure, and it was some reward they got,' muttered the American grimly.

The Air Commodore continued: 'The package contained a micro-film of what seemed to be scientific plans and formulae, prefixed by a cypher written in ink on the film. Major Booth, perceiving the significance of this, took a statement from the Germans and phoned his Zonal Headquarters for instructions.'

The American again interrupted. 'You must understand that they were slow on the long distance line; very slow. Maybe I was slow, too, not to realize that there was something phoney about such a long delay.'

Raymond resumed. 'Major Booth was ordered to hand over the message on the film to his own decoding department and then wait for a special scientific investigator from Bonn. This man arrived so soon afterwards that Major Booth became suspicious. When the special investigator demanded the micro-film Major Booth said he would

fetch it himself from the decoding department. He went off, leaving the investigator alone with the two Germans. Actually, what the Major did was phone back to his headquarters. He was told that their man couldn't possibly have arrived.

From this it became clear that the telephone had been tapped — or at any rate, the Major's report had been overheard — and an enemy agent was now at work.'

The American stepped in again. 'We were in the thick of an epidemic of

'flu at the time, and down to half our normal office staff.'

'When, with an armed guard, Major Booth returned to his office,'

continued the Air Commodore slowly, 'the bogus investigator had disappeared. The two Germans were still there. They were dead, having been shot by some sort of gas pistol.'

'And the film?' interposed Biggles.

'We still have it. Had Major Booth returned alone to his office with it, no doubt he would have been shot too, and the enemy agent would have got what he really came for. But it didn't work out that way. The plans have now been identified with the atomic sub-station at Heatherstone Moor, in Scotland. The written message simply said that more messages would follow. I will now ask Professor Frail and Colonel Barclay to give you their angle.'

'No plans or documents of any sort are missing from Heatherstone Moor,'

said Professor Frail, shortly.

'Hard as it is to believe, we are forced to the conclusion that the plans were copied by someone who had access to them,' said Colonel Barclay.

Biggles put a question. 'I take it there's no possibility of an outsider

breaking in and copying the plans without taking them away ? '

The Professor shrugged. 'It's hard to imagine how anyone could get in.

While the thing is in doubt my department remains under a shadow.'

'Of course, Heatherstone Moor isn't Harwell,' explained Colonel Barclay.

'I don't suppose a dozen people outside those employed there know of its existence. We satisfied local curiosity by labelling the place a salmon breeding research station — suggested by the fact that a stream passes close to the buildings.' He handed Biggles a photograph which he took from his briefcase.

Looking at it Biggles asked: 'What actually goes on at Heatherstone Moor

? '

'Purely theoretical calculations in connection with the synthetic production of certain radio-active elements. Figures that cannot be discussed even in this office,' declared Professor Frail.

'I see you have the latest type of man-proof wire fence,' observed Biggles, his eyes still on the photograph.

'Naturally. And we have, of course, the usual security precautions, including an X-ray plant for examining all staff before they leave the building. It's an embarrassing business but there it is. No one objects.'

'How far is the stream from the buildings?' Biggles asked.

Professor Frail made a gesture of impatience. 'Really, I can't see that this is getting us anywhere. I have urgent work waiting for me. I suggest we go to Heatherstone immediately, where Doctor Mills, my assistant, can deal with these routine questions.'

'Have you a landing ground at Heatherstone ? ' asked Biggles.

'Yes. It was one of the reasons why the site was chosen.

To get there any other way would be a slow business. The place is in the remote Highlands.'

'I'll fly you up if you like.'

'Very well.'

'Just one other question,' persisted Biggles. 'Is there anyone - other than people like gamekeepers and forestry workers - living in the vicinity ? '

'Only the man who owns the fishing rights of the river on the lower part of the moor,'

volunteered Colonel Barclay. He went on: 'As a matter of fact we've checked up on him pretty exhaustively because he's of foreign extraction and owns an aircraft - although of course, he never comes near our establishment.'

'What's he doing with an aircraft ? '

'He uses it to deliver salmon, and game in season, to the big London hotels. Several people are doing that, cashing in on areas which by ordinary transport would be too far from the London markets. His name was Felceman. Since becoming naturalized he's changed it to Felce. He had a very good war record with the Free Czech Air Force.

Anyway, he never comes near us so we have nothing against him.'

'Still, an aircraft so near you must necessarily be an object of some suspicion,' remarked Biggles.

'We thought it seemed a bit too obvious,' opined Barclay. 'I mean, if the man was up to any funny business he'd hardly invite suspicion by parking a plane so close to us.'

Biggles nodded and turned to the Air Commodore. 'I take it that it's all right for me to fly these gentlemen back to Heatherstone Moor, sir ? '

'Certainly.'

The American stood up. 'Well, I wish you luck. There's a transport leaving for Berlin at noon so I guess I'll take it. I hope, Inspector Bigglesworth, that you catch your fish.'

'I'll take a net,' answered Biggles, smiling, as he shook hands.

Before touching down inside the formidable man-proof fences of the Heatherstone Establishment Biggles added some mental pictures to the photograph Professor Frail had shown him. He noted a little footbridge over the stream below the entrance gates.

Beyond it the moor stretched away to distant skylines, lonely and utterly deserted except for a group of isolated buildings which he assumed to be those of the commercial sportsman Felce, or Felceman. A large shed was obviously his hangar.

Circling low before coming in to land he noted, too, that a concrete gatehouse, the only entrance to the establishment, screened the footbridge from the view of anyone in the main building.

A little group of people came out to meet the aircraft, among them a dapper little man whom Professor Frail introduced as Doctor Mills, the Deputy Director.

Smiling, and obviously anxious to be agreeable, Dr. Mills turned out to be a pleasant contrast to his rather taciturn superior. Indeed, the whole atmosphere relaxed when the professor, after explaining the purpose of Biggles's visit, went off to attend to some urgent business.

After a short talk with Mills Biggles said he'd like to take a stroll round the whole place, on his own; which he did, walking down the stream as far as the footbridge where he spent a little while. He then returned to the main building, where he rejoined Doctor Mills, who conducted him on a tour of the Establishment.

This inspection, which occupied some time, yielded nothing beyond a rather uncomfortable atmosphere of suspicion, which, in the circumstances, was perhaps to be expected. In so-called 'laboratories,'

which looked more like futuristic counting houses than anything else, the scientists and mathematicians to whom Biggles spoke seemed to regard each other with cold disfavour. He realized the reason for this, of course.

The responsibility for safeguarding the secrets of the Establishment rested on the shoulders of everyone who worked in it, and one of them, obviously, had broken faith.

As Doctor Mills put it, after they had rejoined Professor Frail in his private office: '

Everybody is so much under everybody else's eye that it seems impossible to suspect anybody. Wherefore we must either suspect everybody or nobody.' He pointed to a miniature camera mounted on a stand, and added:

'The copies could have been made in this room. At least six people have keys, apart from the Chief.'

Colonel Barclay, who was present, explained: 'You see, Bigglesworth, in an establishment of this kind, where it is impossible to keep secrets in watertight compartments, we rely mainly on sealing off the whole building from the outside world.

The grounds are patrolled day and night. No one can pass the gatehouse, either in or out, without being checked, and everyone, including myself and Doctor Mills, must be prepared for search and X-ray screening when, going out.'

'Have you any theory about this matter, Inspector Bigglesworth ? ' asked Professor Frail curtly.

'Yes — but it is only a theory,' answered Biggles. 'Well? What are you going to do ? '

Biggles spoke apologetically. 'I'd like to see every member of your staff who had access to this office during the period when the plans must have been copied. I'll see them together. You might call them in now.'

Professor Frail opened his mouth as if to argue, but thought better of it. Instead, he picked up his inter-com telephone and gave the necessary order.

Biggles leaned back against the window while, with a subdued murmur along the corridor, the room filled with people. The black-coated figures had the air of gathering storm clouds.

The professor tapped his desk with a pencil, and through an uneasy, almost hostile silence, announced: 'Gentlemen, this is Inspector Bigglesworth from Scotland Yard. I need not waste time explaining his errand. We are all aware, painfully aware, of it.

Inspector Bigglesworth will speak to you.'

Unlike most of those present Biggles presented an untroubled face, but when he spoke there was a hard edge on his voice. 'As Professor Frail has already remarked, gentlemen, this is a painful situation. It could hardly be otherwise, for outside personal considerations the country is faced with a grave threat. In plain English, what has happened is, someone in this room has copied certain plans for transmission to a potential enemy.'

A murmur of protest broke out among the scientists, but Biggles stopped it with a movement of his hand. 'Until the culprit is found, as he will be, you are all under suspicion, and that, for those of you who are innocent, is a horrible state of affairs. But how can it be otherwise?

Now before

I do anything else I am going to ask the guilty party to end this lamentable episode by coming forward. Meanwhile, no one will leave the station. It is now six o'clock. The man responsible for this has four hours to think it over. At ten o'clock we shall meet here again - unless, of course, my appeal is answered before then. Work can now proceed as usual. That's all. Thank you, gentlemen.' Biggles went out of the room followed by a buzz of indignation.

As he walked through the bleak corridors towards the exit he was wondering if the trap he had set would work, for it was one of the oldest in the history of detection. What he had actually done, of course, was put up a bluff in the hope that the guilty person would either strike at him or make a move that would give him a lead. Not for a moment did he suppose seriously that the traitor would confess.

He had nearly reached the guardhouse when Colonel Barclay overtook him.

'Just a minute, Bigglesworth,' he said. 'It may or may not mean anything but I have just learned from one of my scouts that Felceman has been working all day on his Moth. It struck me that he might have been fitting long-distance tanks - or something. He might even be getting ready to move off for good.'

'I was just going over to have a word with him,' replied Biggles.

'And I thought you might like to see this,' Colonel Barclay handed him a photograph. '

Taken just after the war. When I was checking up on him I got a copy from the portrait he submitted with his application for his pilot's licence.'

Biggles looked hard at the photograph and handed it back. 'Thanks,' he said, and after showing his pass at the gate, walked on.

Darkness was closing in as he made his way along the bank of the

stream to the footbridge. Reaching it, he sat down and smoked several cigarettes thoughtfully, by which time it was quite dark. Then, getting up, he manipulated cords attached to either side of the handrail and pulled in a fine nylon net which he had set on his visit to the spot three hours earlier. He was not thinking of salmon as he drew it in. In fact, he was by no means confident that he would catch anything. But on his first sight of the photograph of the Heatherstone Moor sub-station, when Professor Frail had shown it to him at Scotland Yard, the thought had struck him that the stream was a ready-made line of communication from the Establishment to the outside.

As he searched through the rubbish that his net had caught - indeed, all the while he had been waiting - he was preoccupied with something else.

The photograph of Felceman.

He knew he had seen the man before, but he was some time working out where the meeting had occurred. Then he remembered . . . the lone Spitfire beset by half a dozen Messerschmitts. He had gone to the rescue.

He and the unknown pilot had fought their way out of the scramble and later landed on his own squadron airfield. There the stranger had thanked him, his foreign accent thickened by emotion and excitement. 'You save me that time, sir. They come too many for me, these Boches.' Biggles had never learned the man's name. Indeed, he had forgotten the incident until the photograph recalled it to his mind.

His soliloquy ended abruptly as his questing fingers closed over a small, smooth, very light object. Removing

the weeds that clung to it he dried it on his handkerchief, when, in the light of a match, it was revealed to be a cylinder the size and shape of a shaving stick. Unscrewing the cap he drew out a piece of paper. He was afraid the message would be in code, but it was in clear English. He smiled grimly as he read: 'Be careful. A Scotland Yard man is here. He may visit you. If trouble, liquidate him and follow emergency routine.

Bring the last consignment. Acknowledge receipt of this by switching

lights as usual.'

Biggles re-read the message, replaced it in the container, screwed on the cap, threw it back into the stream and watched it go on its way as lightly as a cork. Then he lit another cigarette and settled down to wait for the message to reach its destination.

The lights were on in Felceman's hangar. He kept his eyes on the yellow square. Time dragged interminably, but still he watched. Then, at long last, came the signal that the message had been received. The hangar lights blinked off and on again. The signal, Biggles did not doubt, had been watched for with equal anxiety by a pair of eyes behind a window of the research station.

He set off across the moor towards the hangar. He was puzzled. Why, he wondered, had Felceman turned against the country which, during the war, he had risked his life to serve? There was something wrong about that, somewhere, he decided. Still, he would soon know the answer.

As he drew near the hangar the clink of metal on metal became audible.

Following this came the staccato chatter of an electric riveter.

Evidently Felceman was still busy.

Taking advantage of a lull in the noise Biggles rapped on the transit port of the main doors, which were closed. The only reply was a further tattoo on the riveter. He waited a moment, then pushed open the port and stepped through.

The hangar was brightly lit. The sound of the riveter came from under the Moth's engine cowling, which was open. Too late he saw it had no operator. A hard object pressed into the small of his back. 'March, mister,' said a voice.

Biggles walked forward. A switch clicked on the wall behind him and the chatter of the riveter stopped.

'I hear you knock, so I walk round from other side,' said the voice.

'I thought it might save us both trouble if I walked in,' explained Biggles. 'Do you mind if I turn round ? ' Without waiting for an answer he turned, and as they faced each other he heard Felceman catch his breath. 'Remember me?' asked Biggles quietly.

'How could I forget you ? ' muttered Felceman awkwardly. 'You save my life that day.

But now you are not my friend. Is it that you come for the radium ? '

It was Biggles's turn to stare. Tor the what ? '

'The radium. The synthetic radium. You pretend you do not know what goes on there?'

He pointed in the direction of the research station. 'Well, suppose I do have some radium,

' he went on recklessly. 'Oh no, it is not for me. I am not a spy against Britain. It is for my friends who are still prisoners. I help them to escape. For escape they need money.

Radium means money, the money that buys freedom.'

'Just a minute—just a minute,' protested Biggles. 'I don't know what you're talking about.

What's this about radium ? '

'The radium they make.'

'Who told you that ? '

'Somebody.'

'Well, whoever told you that was a liar. The only thing they make there is figures on paper. It looks to me, Felceman, as if some smart guy has taken you to the cleaners.'

Biggles lit a cigarette. 'The people whom you think are your friends are your enemies, and mine. When they're finished with you, you'll be in a concentration camp with the friends you imagine you're helping. Have you ever seen any of this radium ? '

Felceman was staring at Biggles's face. 'No,' he admitted.

'You had some to deliver. Where is the capsule ? '

Felceman put a hand in his pocket and drew out a container identical with the one Biggles had netted in the stream. Slowly, as though reluctant to have his doubts confirmed, he unscrewed the cap. 'They told me it is dangerous to expose radium '

'This sort won't hurt you,' Biggles told him drily. Felceman shook the capsule and stared at the roll of micro-film that dropped into his hand.

Now you see what you've been doing - playing into the hands of the very people who are holding your friends.' 'What do I do ? ' asked Felceman helplessly.

'You'd better give me that gun for a start, before you get into mischief,' Biggles told him.

Felceman handed it over without a word.

Now,' went on Biggles, 'who is the man at the Research Station who sends you these containers ? '

'I have never seen him and I don't know his name.' 'Is that the truth ? '

'I swear it. My orders come from a hotel in London where I take my salmon. One salmon has the container in its throat. But if you want to catch the man at the Station I tell you how you can do it.'

'How ? '

'By using the emergency routine. Those were my last orders. It is simple.

I signal with my lights that I have the message. Then I take my plane and land on the Station airstrip.

The man you want will be there, waiting to escape. Perhaps we both go and pick him up.'

'I think that's a very good idea,' agreed Biggles. 'I'll help you to get the machine out. We'

ll deal with the salmon-buying gentleman in London later.'

Ten minutes later, as they took off and headed for the Heatherstone Research Station landing strip, only the lighted squares of the windows were visible. Then, as though in answer to a signal, the landing lights outlining the airstrip were flashed on.

'They're operated by the security police from the guardhouse,' Biggles told his companion. 'Only a high authority would have dared to phone for them to be turned on.'

Felceman did not answer.

As Biggles brought the machine to a standstill a man running towards them was for a moment silhouetted against the lighted ground-floor windows of the Research Station.

Torch in hand, Biggles jumped down and waited. At the same time, from the yellow splash of the guard-house door, poured uniformed figures, running.

The landing lights went out. Biggles supposed that the police had become suspicious.

The running man loomed up. 'Get going, you fool,' he snarled. 'What are you doing standing there ? '

Biggles flashed the light full on him. Blinking in the beam stood Doctor Mills.

'All right. That'll do,' said Biggles crisply.

'So it's you!' For a second Mills hesitated. Then he crouched, and with a growl deep in his throat, sprang. Biggles saw the flash of steel and flung up an arm to protect himself.

At the same time he put out his foot. Mills tripped over it and sprawled.

Then, in some curious way, there were two figures on the ground. An arm went up, and fell. There was a grunt. Felceman rose, breathing heavily.

By this time the torches of the security police were lighting the scene.

There was a babble of excited conversation as two of them bent over Mills, who, as far as they were concerned, was still the Deputy Director.

Colonel Barclay panted up, a service revolver in his hand. 'Bigglesworth, what on earth's going on here ? ' he demanded.

'Here's your man, Colonel,' answered Biggles briefly. 'Mills ? ' The Colonel's voice cracked with incredulity. 'Who does this machine

belong to ? '

Felceman stepped forward. 'I give myself up,' he said naïvely.

'Stand where you are,' ordered Biggles. 'You haven't finished yet. You're coming with me to deliver a salmon in London.' Turning to the colonel he explained the position as briefly as possible. 'I'll leave Mills in your care,' he concluded. 'The Yard will handle the business at the hotel end, and no doubt square accounts with Felceman here, who has been no more than a dupe. I'll see you later to tidy up the details. Come on, Felceman.

Let's get weaving. Good night, Colonel. You can tell the fellows here that they can smile again. They're in the clear, now. It's all over bar the enquiry.'

'Good night, Bigglesworth. Thanks for calling,' returned the colonel cheerfully.

'Don't mention it,' answered Biggles, turning to the machine.

THE CASE OF

THE LUNATIC AT LARGE

Biggles strode into the Operations Room at Air Police Headquarters, laid his portfolio on the desk and turned sombre eyes on his three police-pilot assistants who were having their 'elevenses.' 'You can give me a cup of that,' he said wearily. 'I need something.'

'Now what is it ? ' inquired Ginger.

'You'd never guess,' answered Biggles grimly. He accepted a cup of tea from Algy, sipped it, put it down and opened his cigarette case. 'I've been to the Yard. I've also been to the Air Ministry,' he went on.

'Everyone is running round in circles in an advanced state of heeby-jeebies.'

'Tell us why?' requested Bertie. 'I'm all worked up.'

'So are a lot of other people,' Biggles told him. 'Of all the crazy affairs that have come our way this one is the tops. Listen, and I'll tell you about it.' He sank into his chair.

'There are, in the R.A.F., two flying officers by the name of Glibb - Charles and John.

They are twins, and for that reason, no doubt, they are more attached to each other than ordinary brothers. Both are night-bomber pilots; and both, at their own request, are serving in the same squadron. They entered the Service during the war and survived two operational tours, more than once being badly shot about. In view of what has happened it is important to remember that. Their nerves, we may suppose, became somewhat frayed.' Biggles took another sip of tea.

'Now Charles is, or was, Mess Secretary on his Station,' he resumed. 'The other day a surprise inspection by an Air Ministry accountant officer revealed that a sum of money which should have been in his safe was missing. He admitted taking the money but offered no explanation; wherefore he was of course put under close arrest. He now awaits a court-martial and possibly a prison sentence.

'John now comes into the picture. His reaction to this lamentable state of affairs appears to have sent him off his rocker. Three days ago he took off in a Halifax, with full tanks, and a load of bombs on board, to do some high altitude practice bombing over Heligoland. He took off before his crew could get on board. This strange event being noticed he was promptly recalled. He ignored the signal. Some hours later a message was received from him which made it clear that his strange behaviour was not accidental but deliberate. He issued an ultimatum. He said, in effect, that if his brother was not released from arrest forthwith, with a guarantee that the prosecution would be dropped, he would, on Saturday night, during the hours of darkness, proceed to unload his bombs on the Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough.' Biggles's eyes made a lugubrious survey of the faces of his audience.

'Nuts!' murmured Algy. 'Absolutely nuts.'

Biggles shrugged. 'Nuts is the word. Unfortunately, the mental condition of a man who operates a bomb release has no effect on the explosive nature of his cargo. To-day is Thursday. In two days, unless this lunatic is bluffing, he is liable to do a great deal of damage, and, what is worse, kill a lot of people.'

'Do you think he's bluffing ? ' asked Algy.

'I wouldn't know about that. All I know is, the Air Ministry would rather not take the risk.'

'What about the brother ? '

'He knows nothing about it. What could he do ? '

'He could tell his brother not to be a silly ass,' said Bertie.

'How? No one has the remotest idea of where he's parked himself and the Halifax. When he flies over on Saturday a green light will indicate that the ultimatum has been accepted.

As things stand, it looks as if the Air Ministry will have to swallow its wrath and give in.

I've got John Glibb's docket in my bag. I've glanced at it. His medical history isn't too good. Twice his nerves have nearly cracked and he had to be laid off to rest. In fact, he was nearly discharged as unfit, but he pleaded to be allowed to stay on. The Air Ministry is now regretting that it acceded to his request - but regrets don't help anybody. The clear fact is, under the strain of the miserable business in which his brother is involved, his brain has cracked and he's gone round the bend, poor chap.'

'What are we supposed to do about this ? ' asked Algy. 'Find him, of course.'

'Which means, I take it, that the police and the Air Force haven't a

clue

? '

'Quite right. Every station in the country has put every available machine into the air, but of V for Vixen - that's the name of the machine

-there's no sign. That isn't surprising, since its petrol would give it an endurance range of about four thousand miles. Which means that it might be anywhere between Timbuctoo and the North Pole.'

'When he takes off, radar will soon pick him up,' predicted Ginger confidently.

'And then what ? ' questioned Biggles sarcastically. 'What are you going to do? Shoot him down? You couldn't do that without proof that he is resolved to carry out his threat.

Apart from that, the Air Ministry will think twice before it knocks down a machine loaded to capacity with high explosive. Suppose it fell in the middle of a town? Pretty problem, isn't it ? '

'And no one has an idea of where he might be?' prompted Ginger.

'Not so far. That's the puzzle that has been handed to me to solve. I'm now going to study his record to see if I can get a line. As I see it there is just one guide, although the time factor may not be long enough for us to follow it up. He can't have landed on a proper airfield or he would have been spotted. To land anywhere else must mean that he knows the place intimately; for, after all, he is still a pilot, and as such he wouldn't be such a fool as to put down a heavily loaded machine on an unknown surface. He'd need a lot of room. Our only hope is to back-track his career, as shown in his record, until we find a place that he has visited where a big machine might be put down. It is bound to be somewhere remote, for practically all suitable ground has been taken over either for airfields or for agricultural purposes, neither of which would suit him. Now you can all start thinking, while I go through this docket.'

'I suppose it's no use taking up a machine to have a look round ? '

suggested Ginger.

'Not the slightest. The country has already been covered from Land's End to John o'

Groats. If the machine is still in the United Kingdom, and we've no indication that it is, either it's under cover or else it has been carefully camouflaged. Either way, we shan't find it by tearing about haphazard. This docket is our only hope.'

Biggles took the big wad of documents from his portfolio, opened the buff manilla cover, rested his head in his hands and began to read.

Ignoring lunch, he did not speak again until tea-time, when he turned over the last of the many papers in the folder.

'Well ? ' queried Algy.

Biggles shook his head. 'Not a thing. There's nothing either in his private life or his service career that offers anything like a suggestion. I'll go through the whole thing again when I've had something to eat, to make sure that I haven't overlooked anything.'

The following morning, Friday, the last clear day, found Biggles still sitting engrossed over the docket. He refused to be drawn into what he declared to be the futile business of an air reconnaissance without anything to work on. 'If that machine is in the open someone would have spotted it by now,' he asserted wearily. He pointed to the docket, now showing signs of wear and tear. 'If the answer isn't here, we're beaten.'

'To-morrow will be Saturday,' reminded Ginger.

'You needn't tell me,' answered Biggles grimly, and returned to the wad of documents.

It was late in the evening when he looked up and said to Algy: 'I'm afraid it's clutching at a straw but you might as well do something as sit there twiddling your thumbs.' He passed a slip of paper. 'I want you to take the car and go to this address in Knightsbridge.

Mrs. Glibb - that's the mother, and next of kin - lives there. Find out, discreetly, where John used to go wild-fowling.'

Algy stared. 'What's wildfowling got to do with it ? '

'Nothing, probably. But there's just a chance that it might lead to something - or rather, somewhere. Here, under the heading of recreations, I see "wildfowling." That suggests a district off the beaten track. Find out where John Glibb went to shoot wildfowl.'

Algy departed.

It was about two hours later when he returned. 'Well ? ' asked Biggles impatiently.

'Aucherlocherbie.'

'Aucherlocherbie,' repeated Biggles slowly. 'Vaguely, that name rings a bell.'

'It's in the north of Scotland. Mrs. Glibb says her son used to fly there sometimes during the war. He took a sporting gun and sent her ducks and things.'

'The name doesn't occur in these records. But I've heard it before. Just a minute - let me think.'

'I gather Glibb didn't actually serve at Aucherlocherbie,' said Algy. 'He went there on a short refresher course, or something.'

Biggles snapped his fingers. 'I've got it! Ginger, get Works and

Buildings, Air Ministry, on the phone.'

Ginger complied. When the call came through Biggles took the receiver and put a question. Then he listened for what seemed a long time. When he hung up there was a gleam of hope in his eyes. 'I've got it now,' he announced. 'The place is in Sutherlandshire. It was a hush-hush bomb experimental depot in the war. The name caused so much trouble in signals that it was changed to Fargo. When Glibb was in bomber command he might well have gone there for one reason or another.'

Two hangars were put up for visiting machines.'

'What happens there now ? ' asked Algy.

'Nothing. The station was one of the first to be abandoned at the end of the war, the Ministry having no further use for it.'

'We might have a look at it.'

'I can't get there fast enough,' answered Biggles. 'Get the Proctor out.'

We'll all go.'

'Why not wait until morning and do it in daylight ? '

'I daren't risk it. To-morrow will be Saturday. Put a couple of brollies in the machine.'

'Are you going to drop in ? '

'I am. If Glibb's there, and hears a machine land, he'll guess what's cooking, and may make a bolt for it. Aside from that, I don't know what sort of state the landing strip is in after all these years, for which reason, in the dark, I'd rather trust a parachute than landing wheels.'

Ginger can drop in with me. The machine can stand by and come in afterwards if necessary. We've some way to go so let's get mobile.'

It was the dark hour before dawn when the Proctor, having refuelled at Kinloss, arrived over its objective. There was some difficulty in finding the place, for apart from the absence of a moon, feathers of mist were creeping in from the sea. Eventually, however, Biggles judged the area from the deeply indented coast-line; so, leaving Algy at the controls, with instructions to watch for signals, he stepped out into the void.

Ginger followed, and after the usual period of anxiety associated with a night drop, he found himself stepping out of his harness on a limitless expanse of rough grass mixed with young heather. He heard Biggles whistle softly in the gloom, answered, and rolling his parachute into a ball, walked to meet him. Not a light showed anywhere. Nothing moved. The only sounds were the fading drone of the aircraft and the cries of disturbed gulls.

'The hangars are on the east side. They should be over here,' said Biggles quietly.

Walking on, peering into the gloom, they struck the 'hard standing' of the old perimeter track. Following this they soon came upon the ruins of the wartime establishment.

This did nothing to relieve a landscape that was already depressing enough. Indeed, it is doubtful if there is any picture more melancholy than that presented by the disintegrating hutments of an abandoned camp.

In this case, time and the weather had done their worst. Doors hung awry on their hinges and empty window-frames stared blankly, like sightless eyes. Roofs of felt and corrugated iron had been torn off by the wind and lay where they had fallen, giving the place an appearance of having been blitzed.

Biggles did not comment. He had seen similar wrecks before and there was nothing to say. It was not until the enormous bulk of the two hangars loomed before them that he laid a hand on Ginger's arm for caution.

Moving slowly now they advanced silently, their feet making no noise on moss that had almost smothered the tarmac out of existence. The great doors were closed. Very quietly Biggles opened the little accommodation door. The beam of his torch cut a wedge in the blackness and moved slowly towards a wall. Empty oil drums, mouldering tyres, and similar debris lay about; but there was no aircraft. The light died as Biggles switched off. They withdrew, and in the first grey light of the dawn walked on to the next hangar.

Before they reached it they had good reason to suspect that their quest had ended, for the doors were open, and from somewhere in the dark interior came a noise as weird as could be imagined, a sound so eloquent of hopeless misery that Ginger felt a chill run down his spine. A man was crying.

Biggles looked at Ginger, raised his eyebrows, and moved forward with no more noise than the shadow of a cloud. No one could be seen, but the growing light was reflected faintly on the perspex and metal fittings of a big aircraft. For a few more paces Biggles continued his advance. Then he stopped. His torch flashed, and came to rest on a slim figure in R.A.F. uniform that was sitting hunched up on an undercarriage wheel.

Apparently the man was taken quite by surprise, for as the light of the torch fell on him he sprang to his feet with a gasp of shock.

'All right, Glibb, take it easy,' said Biggles quietly. 'Who are you?

What d'you want ? '

came the reply, in a voice as taut as a banjo string.

'We just waffled along to see what you were doing, that's all,' replied Biggles casually. '

Have a cigarette ? ' He offered his case.

The unhappy pilot hesitated, his lips parted, his eyes wild. Then, with a trembling hand he reached out and took a cigarette. 'I suppose

you've come to arrest me,' he said dully, as Biggles flicked his lighter.

'Oh, I wouldn't say that,' returned Biggles carelessly. 'Of course, you're behaving like a silly ass and your Station Commander is in a flap about it. No wonder. He's liable to be torn off a strip for losing a machine. But no doubt you'll be able to explain things to him when you get back.'

'What have they done with my brother ? '

'Nothing, as far as I know. They were more concerned about you.'

'Yes, of course,' agreed the flying officer, drawing heavily on his cigarette. He looked up.

'Who exactly are you?'

'I'm just the bloke they call in to straighten out this sort of thing.'

'I'd no intention of bombing anybody, really.'

'Nobody supposed seriously that you had,' prevaricated Biggles easily.

'Of course, you may have a job to prove that.'

'No job at all,' declared the flying officer. 'I've no bombs.' Biggles stared. 'What did you do with them ? '

Glibb laughed foolishly, the laugh of a man overwrought and near to hysteria. 'I dropped them in the sea on the way here.'

Biggles drew a deep breath. 'Had I known that it would have saved me losing some sleep.

Tell me, what gave you this crazy idea ? '

'Oh, I was mad, I suppose,' returned Glibb miserably. 'Of course, you know about my brother taking that money. He took it, but it was for me. I lent it to a friend of mine who had got into debt. He promised to pay it back but he didn't. That's all there was to it. If that Air Ministry type hadn't come along to make a surprise check all would have been well, because I could have put the money back out of my next month's pay. The thought of my brother

carrying the can on my account was more than I could stand, and — well, I don't know what happened after that.'

Biggles dropped his cigarette end and put his foot on it.

'I see,' he said softly. 'Well, this is no place for a picnic. Let's drift along home.' He turned to Ginger. 'Make a signal to Algy to let the Chief know it's okay. Then he can return to base. There's no need for him to land here. We'll trundle along in the Halifax.'

He turned back to Glibb. 'Is that all right with you?'

The pilot nodded. 'If I could face the flak up the Rhine for a couple of years I can take a little thing like this,' he said calmly.

'That's the spirit,' commended Biggles, as he turned to the cockpit.

Little remains to be told. The twin brothers, whose affection had led them into trouble, faced a court-martial, as was inevitable. But in view of the circumstances, and the fact that the money was repaid, taken in conjunction with their war records, the court took a lenient view and they suffered nothing worse than a severe reprimand.

It was, as Biggles told the Air Commodore when they returned to the Yard, just one of those things.

THE CASE OF

THE FLYING CLOWN

Air Commodore Raymond, of the Special Air Police Section at Scotland Yard, watched morosely as Biggles and his police pilots filed into his office and found seats.

'Don't look so worried, sir,' said Biggles sympathetically. 'It'll all come right in the end.'

'One of these days it won't come right, and my thirty years of conscientious work will be forgotten in the public's howl for somebody's blood.' The Air Commodore pushed the cigarette box forward. 'This Section was started to curtail the activities of a few crooks who saw the advantages of air transport, but it's fast becoming the dogsbody of every other department that finds itself with a knotty job that it can't untangle,' he went on bitterly.

'That's the usual reward for the willing horse,' observed Biggles.

'What's the latest ? '

'Take a look at that,' requested the Air Commodore, pushing forward a photograph.

Biggles looked at it, shook his head sadly, and handed it on to Ginger.

It showed an old-fashioned biplane in flight. Between the wings, struts had been formed into a cage. In the cage was a tiger. The weight was counterbalanced on the opposite side by a clown hanging from a wing-tip.

Pasted on the picture was the caption: Air Thrills Unlimited.

The New International Air Circus opening in Paris next week.

'Even with a slow-flying kite and stabilizing devices, that can be no picnic for the pilot,'

remarked Ginger, passing the photograph on to Bertie Lissie.

Biggles looked at the Air Commodore. 'What's this crazy outfit to do with us ? '

'That's what we'd like to know,' was the answer. 'Maybe nothing. Maybe plenty. I'd say nothing, were it not for certain facts that are not easy to gloss over. The show is, as it claims to be, international, in that it has employees of nearly every nationality in the world. But let me start at the beginning, which occurred a year ago when the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation put a probe into the affairs of the former armaments king and mystery man, Jacob Ironmaster. He brought it on himself by his warmongering machinations. He had already made a fortune out of war and was doing his best to start another. He is, by all accounts, a strange and eccentric man, a misanthrope who appears to hate everybody. He is seldom seen in public, due perhaps to the fact that in his youth he was involved in an accident which deformed him for life. Be that as it may, he is certainly a mischief maker of the most dangerous sort. Actually, the FBI could pin nothing on him, but it has now been discovered that he is the financial backer of this Air Thrills Circus, which was formed, and has been practising its acts, in Germany.'

'I see,' murmured Biggles. 'You're wondering why he has put his money in it.'

'We've discovered that his parents were originally in show business in Ireland, but that seems hardly sufficient reason for this new investment.'

Wait a minute. There's more to come. Our security people decided that they'd like to know more about this curious show, so when it advertised for a super stunt pilot they supplied one — to keep an eye on things. The man who went was Wing-Commander Strickland, who used to do the sensational crazy flying at the RAF Display.'

'You mean Jimmy Strickland ? '

'That's right.'

'How did he get on ? '

'He didn't get on at all. He's dead, and we've reason for thinking that he was murdered.'

Biggles grimaced. 'Nasty. And so you've still no idea of Ironmaster's real angle in this queer set-up ? '

'No. But what worries us is the fact that the show is due to open in Paris at the same time as the World Peace Conference. Not only that, but by some piece of publicity juggling the members of the Conference have accepted an invitation to attend the opening performance.'

Àh! ' breathed Biggles. 'I get it. Ironmaster and the Peace Conference don't mix.'

'Exactly. You'll see now why we're scared that there's more behind this than giving tigers joy rides. The World Conference would become a world disaster if an aircraft happened to crash into it — or drop a tiger into it.'

'Why not get the Paris police to stop the show ? '

'Maybe that's what Ironmaster would like to happen. Paris would like to stop the show, but say it would cause international friction. You know how touchy people are nowadays. The show claims to be international, and it is. There are some Russians —

Cossacks — in it. If the show were closed it would be said that anti-Russian sentiment was the reason.'

'So you get a headache either way, whether the show goes on or comes off?'

'That's about it.'

'How did Jimmy Strickland die?'

'He was killed in a crash. Knowing that a crash could easily happen we believed it until a British mechanic in the show came here and gave us his version of it. There is now reason to believe that Strickland got the information he wanted, but was suspected of being a spy and killed before he could pass it on. It was this mechanic who pulled him out of the wreck. He's in the waiting-room. Perhaps you'd like to hear from his own lips what happened. His name is Jones.'

'I certainly would.'

'I'll have him in.' The Air Commodore pressed a button of his inter-corn.

A minute later a smart-looking young fellow marched in and stood to attention.

'I want you to repeat what you told me this morning,' requested the Air Commodore.

'Very good, sir. It was like this, sir. I was on the airfield. Stunt Strickland, as we called him, had just taken off for a test when a wing seemed to break off at the roots and he went into the ground like a brick. I ran over and pulled him out. He said, 'Tell them to stop Nemo in Paris.' He tried to say more, but he couldn't get it out. Then he died in my arms.'

'He could have been on his way home,' said Biggles, glancing at the Air Commodore.

'I've thought of that possibility.'

Biggles looked back at the mechanic. 'Who is this Nemo ? '

'The flying clown, sir. He does the wing-walking. His stooge, Nix, does the flying. Nemo and Nix. You must have seen their pictures in the papers. Mind you, their act isn't as dangerous as it looks. They use all sorts of safety tricks — suction shoes, quick-opening parachutes, and so on.'

Did you find anything that suggested sabotage when you examined the plane?'

'I didn't get a chance to examine it, sir. It went up in flames. That was queer, too. I was still holding Strickland, not being sure if he was dead, when Nemo rushes up. He took no notice of me but went to the plane.

The next thing was the machine was in flames. I tell you straight, sir, I didn't like the look of it. Not that it matters now. I've walked out.'

'I gather you didn't like Nemo.'

'Everybody hates the sight of him. He's a ropy type. Never takes his make-up off. We reckon he sleeps in it.'

'Thank you, Jones. That's all,' said Biggles. The mechanic went out.

Turning to the Air Commodore Biggles went on: 'What do you want me to do about this ? '

'Strickland's place is vacant. The show is advertising for another stunt pilot. It struck me that you might apply for it. That would give you a chance to get into the gristle of the thing.'

Biggles smiled cynically. 'Thank you very much. I never did like stunting.'

'This is a special occasion. After all, Strickland was a friend of yours.

You're not going to let his murderer get away with it? You can take the others with you. It might help you to get the job if you said you could supply your own mechanics. They could guard your machine against sabotage.'

Biggles nodded. 'All right, sir, you win. I'll go and get organized.'

The night was hot, for Paris in high summer can be very hot. The atmosphere in the trailer caravan which Biggles had shared with his comrades for three days, since he had taken over the stunt pilot's job, was stifling. From the animal cages not far away came an occasional growl and that peculiar smell wild animals in captivity give off.

'Keep your voices low,' Biggles warned the others. 'A caravan lends itself to eavesdropping. As I was saying, most of the fellows here seem to be good chaps, whatever their nationality may be. They're professionals, and concerned only with the success of the show. They haven't much time for politics. There are, of course, exceptions.'

'Such as Nemo and Nix?' put in Ginger softly.

'Yes.'

'I thought clowns were intended to make you laugh, but there's something about those two white-faced horrors that gives me the creeps,' muttered Algy. 'I'm sorry Nix is in charge of the air section. He had the cheek to check my work this afternoon after I'd top-overhauled your machine.'

Biggles drew on his cigarette. 'It seems he was the last man to touch Strickland's machine before it crashed. It's still hard to see how he and Nemo could sabotage the Peace Conference. All we can do is keep our eyes skinned. I have a feeling that if some devilment has been cooked it will happen in the grand finale, when Nemo and Nix do their low-level stunt act over the procession, with the animals and trainers being towed round the airfield by trucks.'

Nemo stands on a wing, you know, and pelts the spectators with paper balls.'

'It'd be a bit late to do anything if he used grenades instead of paper balls, old boy,'

observed Bertie. 'Don't forget he could easily fly off and escape in that old kite they use.'

Biggles's eyes suddenly went to the door. He raised a hand warningly.

'Hold it,' he said quietly. 'There's somebody outside.' He took a pace and threw open the door. With its forefeet on the step stood a lion, the yellow light from inside reflected in its eyes. Biggles stood rigid.

'What do you want, you old rascal ? ' he demanded sternly.

Another voice, rich with Irish brogue, spoke from the darkness. 'Come back here, Major, or begorra I'll have the hide off you.' The order was followed by a sound as if someone was hitting a tin plate with a spoon.

The animal turned and ambled off into the gloom. A moment later came the clang of a cage door being shut. Footsteps sounded, and a burly figure in red breeches and a khaki shirt appeared. 'Sure and it was only old Major,' said the Irish voice cheerfully. 'If I'm late with his dinner he's learnt to slip the bolt with his paw.'

'You should be more careful with your cats,' Biggles told him.

'And so I should, and me Paddy O'Shea, the oldest lion tamer in the business.'

'One day Major will bite somebody.'

'If he does I hope it'll be that painted-faced clown Nemo.' 'Come in,' invited Biggles. 'I gather you don't love Nemo ? '

'Tis no secret, me bhoy. It's sacked I would have been by now if I hadn't been so popular with the rest of the troupe. Neither does me old friend Major like him. It's great judges of character are lions.

After forty years in the business, I remember—'

'What don't you like about Nemo ? ' interposed Biggles.

'I don't like anything about him,' answered the lion tamer, accepting a cigarette. 'He's a man with a past, and sour at that. You boys are to be trusted with a secret – that's as plain as me nose is on me face – so I'll tell you why. It was a while ago, and me only a boy, when I first clapped eyes on Nemo. 'Twas at a travelling circus right here in Paris. I was only a spare hand then. Nemo was a tall, handsome feller, and 'twas a mighty fine act he did on the high trapeze. A darling act to be sure –

till a rope broke. 'Tis the luck of the game. He went clean through the safety net and broke himself up on the ground. The crowd laughed. To be sure they laughed, thinking it was part of the act. We left Nemo in the hospital for dead.' The Irishman shuddered. 'Tis not myself that will ever be forgetting the look on his face when he heard the crowd laughing.'

'Apparently he didn't die.'

'That's the size of it, me bhoy. Maybe it would have been better for himself if he had died, instead of living with a hunched back, hating everyone. Knowing the temper of the man it wouldn't surprise me if one day he got his own back on the crowd.'

'That's a sobering thought,' murmured Biggles, frowning. 'If there is something like that in the wind it would be interesting to hear what he and Nix have to say to each other when they're in the air together to-morrow for the full dress rehearsal. I mean, by wireless.'

'So it would. Mike Casey, the operator in the control room, is my nephew.'

'Would he let us in ? '

'Sure and he would if I asked him.'

'Then ask him if

' Biggles broke off short as the

door opened to reveal the ghastly face of the clown Nemo. Excluding the Irishman none of them had seen him so close before, and they stared with mingled sympathy and horror.

The clown's body seemed to have been telescoped, so that his arms appeared unnaturally long, like those of an ape. He moved as though his body were made of rubber; but perhaps the most disconcerting feature was the harsh voice that grated through the lips painted in a grotesque smile.

'Don't you know that to-morrow is the final rehearsal ? ' rasped the clown. 'You've got a busy day in front of you, so get to bed instead of loafing about gossiping. And put these lights out.' He slammed out.

Biggles looked at the others. On his face, which had turned slightly pale, was an expression of understanding. 'No wonder he keeps his make-up on,' he breathed. 'You realize who Nemo is? Ironmaster himself. Now I begin to see daylight. But we'd better put these lights out. As he said, we've a busy day in front of us to-morrow.'

The next day, the rehearsal went forward with the efficiency of a well-planned military operation. Biggles ran through his own act, which included a mock combat. At the end came the big moment. The arena was cleared except for the black-painted biplane of Nemo and Nix.

Biggles, in white overalls like most of the circus hands, made his way towards the control tower, passing on the way the mobile cages of wild animals, cossack riders, show ponies and elephants that were forming up for the concluding procession. As he opened the door of the radio room, Bertie, earphones on his head, turned to look at him. 'Okay,' he said. 'Casey's gone.'

Nemo told him the radio wouldn't be wanted for this rehearsal. 'I've tuned in to inter-com frequency and put it on the loudspeaker.'

'Good work.' Looking through the window Biggles saw the black plane

taking off. It climbed, circling the field. Nemo, who had started astride the fuselage, was working his way out on one of the wings. 'Not so far over, you fool,' came his voice through the loudspeaker. 'That's better.'

Now across the stand. The scum that laughed when I went through the net won't laugh to-morrow. I've waited a long time for this.'

Biggles switched off. 'That's all we wanted to know,' he said quietly.

'He's going to drop something on the Peace Conference stand. Whatever it is it won't be pleasant.'

Bertie was staring. 'But he can't mean that!'

'He's mad, driven insane by an obsession of hate because people laughed when he had the accident that ruined his life. Let's get out of this before anyone sees us.'

Back in the caravan the matter was discussed urgently.

'I suggest you call in Marcel Brissac of the Surete and have Nemo arrested before he can do any harm,' said Algy grimly.

'On what charge? There's no case against him. You can't arrest a man because you think he's going to do something outrageous.'

'But we know he is.'

'We know. But how are we going to prove it?'

'You mean, we shall have to let him commit the crime before we do anything about it. What's the use of that ? ' 'We shall have to let him go far enough to provide us with the evidence we need.'

'How are you going to do that ? '

'I think I can handle it. When he does his act in the finale I shall be flying the machine. I shall, of course, tip Marcel off about what's likely to happen. Come outside where you can see the lay-out of the dressing-rooms and I'll explain.'

Twenty-four hours later, Bertie, in white overalls, stood near the group of gendarmes guarding the flag-draped grandstand from which the Peace Delegates and other high officials had watched the several turns of the Air Circus. A crowd of more than ten thousand people had packed themselves round the horseshoe-shaped arena. Circus hands and animal trainers were busy getting everything ready for the grand finale.

A roar of applause greeted the appearance of Nemo. With a white haversack hanging on his shoulder he shambled out and stood posturing beside the black aircraft. Then, brandishing a toy riding whip in a white-gloved hand he vaulted on to the fuselage and grabbed imaginary reins. There was another roar as the white-masked figure of his pilot strode out and bowed to the crowd with mock dignity.

Perspiration, not entirely due to heat, broke out on Ginger, who stood watching from the control tower with Marcel Brissac and some police officials. He knew that the real Nix was locked in his dressing room with Algy standing guard over him; but he still did not know what Nemo's haversack contained. The only thing he was sure of was, the contents were not paper balls. It looked heavy — heavy enough to get in his way. The question was, would Nemo see through the deception, for if he did the day might still end in disaster.

Biggles climbed into the cockpit, strapped himself in, adjusted his headphones, waved to the mechanics to pull away the wheel chocks and started the engine. By this time Nemo had started to move out on a wing for his wing-walking act. Those in the control tower heard him rasp: 'Why didn't you do your usual handsprings before you got in?'

Biggles, pretending to be busy with the controls, did not answer.

Nemo had now reached the first interplane half-strut, which meant

that his back was towards the cockpit. This moment, apparently, was the one for which Biggles had waited, for he suddenly reached out, grabbed the haversack, and cutting the sling put it on the floor of the cockpit.

Nemo must have realized instantly what this meant, for he was round in a flash, his painted face distorted with fury.

'Take it easy, Ironmaster, the game's up,' said Biggles crisply.

Nemo's answer was to whip an automatic from his pocket.

At that moment Biggles was as near to death as he had ever been: and he knew it. He could think of only one thing to do. He jerked the throttle wide open hoping to shake the clown from his precarious perch. Nemo nearly fell, but recovering his balance hung on to the strut with one hand. With difficulty he dragged himself to an upright position. By that time, as Biggles couldn't stop without running into the crowd, he had lifted the machine into the air.

From his seat he watched his mouthing passenger. Knowing that Nemo was not a pilot he felt the game was now in his hands, for the clown could not kill him without killing himself in the crash that would inevitably follow. True, he had a parachute, but as the aircraft was flying at not more than fifty feet it was no use to him. Biggles, of course, had no intention of climbing. Keeping low, he began a circuit, in order to land.

Nemo must have realized what Biggles had in mind. Very slowly, for the tearing slipstream made fast movement impossible, he raised again the hand that held the gun.

Whether he was prepared to kill both of them, or whether he purposed taking a chance with his parachute, will never be known; for Biggles, seeing what was going to happen, took the only action that would give him a chance to save his life. He put the machine through a slow roll. Nemo fell off, as he was almost bound to. His parachute mush-roomed, but too late. The crowd rose to its feet as the clown plummeted to earth.

Biggles brought the machine round, landed, and taxied tail up to the staff exit. 'I had to do it,' he said in a low voice to Bertie, who ran up.

The public never knew the truth about the accident. Rumours flew, of course, and the story was front page news the following day. But accidents at air displays are not uncommon and the incident was soon forgotten. Naturally, all the sympathy was for the dead clown; and he was, as Biggles said afterwards, to be pitied, for he was one of those men who, having suffered, could only find consolation in seeing others suffer. Which was why he had devoted his life to the trouble-making which had brought him under the scrutiny of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation.

But what the crowd would have thought had it learned that his haversack contained a gallon jar of vitriol, which apparently he intended to shower on the Peace Delegates, is another matter.

THE CASE OF

THE PHONE BOX MURDER

Biggles was walking home from Air Police Headquarters, at Scotland Yard, for a breath of air after a trying spell of office work, which he detested but could not avoid. Air-Constable 'Ginger' Hebblethwaite had volunteered to keep him company.

They were walking up Davies Street when an ambulance standing against the curb, and a little crowd of people, brought from Ginger the observation:

'Looks like an accident.'

'It's no ordinary accident, anyway,' returned Biggles as they drew nearer. 'That's Inspector Gaskin of "C" Division telling the crowd to push off.'

They reached the spot just as the ambulance drove away, and at the request of two constables the onlookers began to disperse.

'More trouble, Inspector ? ' remarked Biggles.

The Inspector looked round. 'Hello, it's you. Of course it's trouble. My job is nothing but trouble. One good thing about it, the old lag we just found here won't trouble us any more.' He jerked a thumb at a red-painted telephone call box.

'Dead ? '

'Yes, and so would you be if someone stuck a knife in your heart up to the hilt.'

'Who did the heart belong to ? '

'Hans Muller, the neatest safe-blower in the business. Whoever stuck this blade in him meant to make a job of it,' went on the inspector, wrapping a piece of muslin round the fatal weapon. 'Funny place to choose for a murder, a glass box on a public pavement. He must have been inside, making a call, when the murderer struck. Either he or Muller must have dropped this. It was on the blood, not under it.' The inspector showed a small piece of pasteboard. 'I haven't had time to look at it properly yet. Fingerprints should tell us which one of 'em dropped it. I know Muller's prints from memory. We'll try the door handle for fingerprints, too. Careful how you handle it,' concluded the inspector as Biggles reached for the card.

'Looks like a piece torn off a menu card,' said Biggles, holding the card by the edge. 'In fact, I'm sure it is. Die Blau. . . . That must have been the name of the place — a restaurant or cafe, I imagine. In Germany or Austria, judging from the language.' He turned the card over. 'Here's the maker's trade mark. Vienna. With yesterday's date on the top it looks as if the job might come my way.'

'How?'

'Because this card must have been in Vienna yesterday — last night, in fact, at dinner-time.'

'He could have flown over.'

'Would Muller, with his criminal record, have a passport ? '

'No. And he wouldn't get through any airport without being spotted by our watchers. It must have belonged to the other feller. What are those letters on the front?'

Biggles looked at the card. As it had been torn, only the first three and last three letters of the top dish could be read. They were UKR, and at the end SCH. 'Soup usually comes first,' he mused. 'I've got it. Ukranean Borsch.'

'What's that? '

'A highly flavoured pink soup — a house speciality in some restaurants.

By the way, did Muller make his call?' 'How would I know that?'

'If he had put his money in, and was waiting to be connected when he was knifed, the money will still be in the box. We can soon settle that by pushing the return button.'

Biggles went into the box and pressed button B. With a metallic clink a single object dropped into the tray. Biggles picked up a small thin square of white metal. Holding it by the edge he showed it to the inspector.

'What the deuce is it?'

'I don't know. There's no mark on it. This is a busy call box so it's a safe bet that Muller must have put it in. I mean, the thing couldn't have been in for any length of time or some other user of the box would have got it out. Muller must have been in a hurry to get, rid of it.'

'Looks as though he was followed, and knew it. What metal is it, anyway?

It isn't silver.

It isn't tin, or zinc. Hm. Queer-feeling stuff.'

A strange expression dawned on Biggles's face. 'I wonder could it be crystalium.'

'That word rings a bell.'

'So it should. It's that new alloy that has just been lifted out of a safe at the United Nations Research Station in Austria. They claim it's a one-way conductor metal which will replace radio valves. Some people would pay a fortune for a sample of it. Things begin to hook up, unless we've run into a coincidence. Muller, you say, was a safe-blower. He's just been to Austria, where someone has blown a safe. You've just picked him up here, and right beside him we find the most valuable object that was in that safe. That should give you something to work on - and give me something to think about.'

'Why you ? '

'I want to know how Muller got to Austria, and back here, without going through the usual routine. That's what it begins to look like to me.'

'I'll take care of this,' said the inspector, wrapping the piece of metal in his handkerchief and putting it in his pocket. 'I'll soon let you know if Muller handled it. I reckon it cost him his life. Did a double-cross on somebody and got knifed for his pains. There was plenty of hate behind the blow that killed him. But I must be getting along. I'll send you word of any developments in your line.'

'Fair enough,' agreed Biggles, and resumed his interrupted walk home.

'What have we walked into this time, I wonder ? ' murmured Ginger.

The question was answered the following day when they were all called into the office of their Chief, Air Commodore Raymond.

'Sit down. I've had Gaskin in here,' began the Air Commodore without preamble. 'He told me what happened last night. You'll be interested to know that the metal is crystalium and that it bears Muller's fingerprints. His marks were on the piece of card, too, but those on the knife handle haven't been identified. Muller must have been to Austria within the last day or two, but he didn't travel by any regular means of transport - air or sea. I don't like the idea of a crook like Muller coming and going as he pleases, because if he can do it others can; which suggests that someone is running an unofficial air shuttle service to the Continent. There might even be a concern catering specially for crooks and their swag. I want you to follow it up. You might find out where that piece of torn menu card came from.'

'There must be at least a score of hotels and cafés in Vienna with the adjective blue in their name.' Biggles smiled. 'All trying to cash in on the Blue Danube, I suppose.'

'I don't care if you have to turn the spotlight on every eating place in Austria. Find the man who supplies the blanks of those cards, or the printer who prints them. He'll tell you what blue restaurants he supplies. And you'd better get cracking on it. If the newspapers start probing this Muller story, and hit on the air angle, they'll run banner headlines about a crooks' air route that'll make us look silly.'

'Okay, sir,' said Biggles.

'So off we go on a Ukranean Borsch hunt,' said Algy, when they were outside.

'There are worse places than Vienna,' Biggles told him. 'We'll fly over in the Proctor.'

Ginger, you can send a wire to the West Bahn Hotel, booking four single rooms and a private sitting-room.'

'That's one of the biggest hotels.'

'The bigger the place the less likely are new arrivals to be noticed,' explained Biggles.

The following morning they were in Vienna, assembled in the sitting-room after unpacking their light suitcases in their rooms.

'We'll try the easy way first,' Biggles told them. 'Here's a list of all the cafés and restaurants of any size that begin with the word blue. I got most of them from the telephone directory. The hall porter gave me one or two others - smaller places. I want you, between you, to cover the lot. In taxis it shouldn't take you long to get round. The best way to work is to go in and order coffee. Later, you can make it lunch. Either way, ask to see the dinner menu. Check the imprint of the printer supplying the card, the style of printing of the word blue, and perhaps the handwriting of the letters UKR and SCH. I don't think they can mean anything but Ukranean Borsch. Of course, it's probable that more than one blue establishment serves that particular soup. Again, it may not be served every day. Anyway, you know what we're looking for. If anybody strikes anything like a clue he'll come back here and let me know. I'll wait.'

First back, late in the afternoon, was Bertie. 'Nothing on my list, old boy,' he reported sadly. 'I never want to see coffee again. I spent an hour at the Blue Dragon watching a suspicious type who seemed to have an interest in me, but it turned out he wanted to teach me to play the zither in six lessons.'

Algy and Ginger returned in due course, each with a negative report.

'No matter,' said Biggles. 'We'll try again to-morrow.'

It was not until the third day, after the list had been exhausted, that the investigation yielded result, and then it was Ginger who hit the trail.

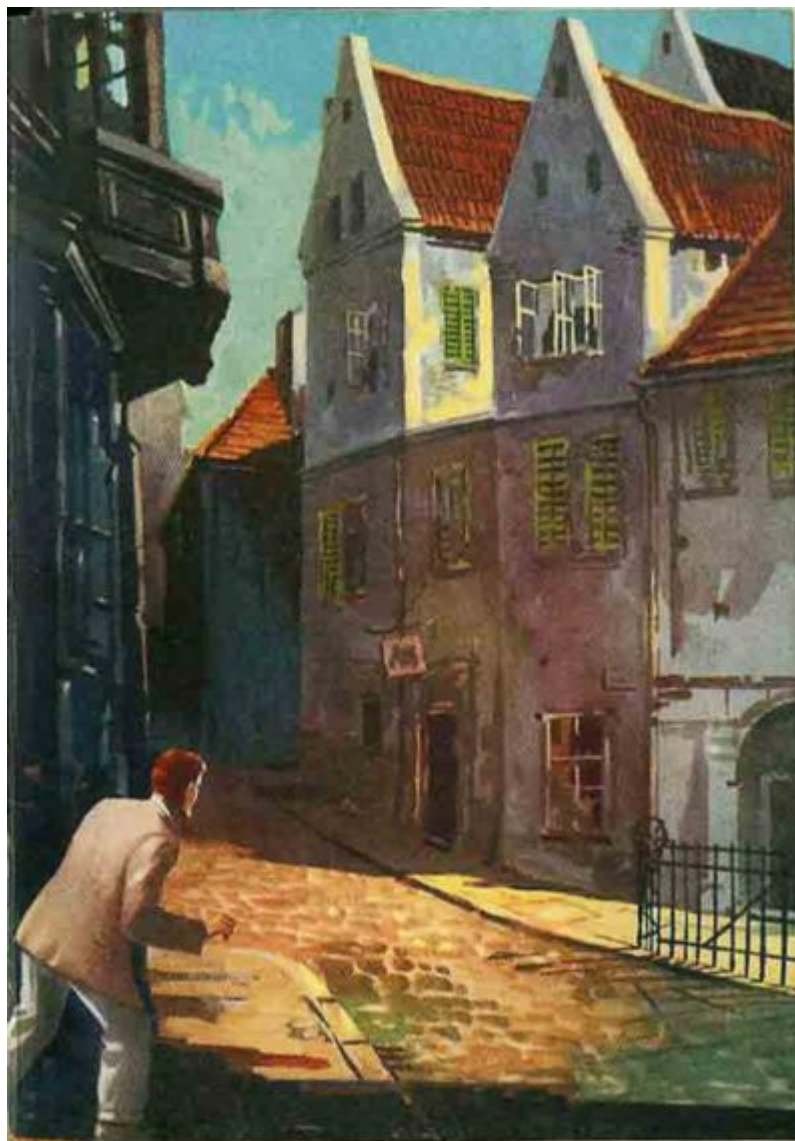
'I believe I've got it,' he announced excitedly, bursting in upon the

others. 'Struck it by accident, too, in a back street. It wasn't on the list. Too small, perhaps, or maybe they didn't want their name in the phone book.'

'Take it easy. Never mind conjecture. Give us the facts,' requested Biggles.

'It's a filthy place behind the station, called Die Blau Gans—The Blue Goose. I had a drink, and seeing some small tables with cloths on, asked the boss - as nasty-looking a piece of work as you ever saw-to let me see the dinner menu. He said they weren't ready.

I may have been a bit indiscreet, for when I asked him if he ever served Ukranean Borsch he gave me a mighty queer look. It may have been my imagination but his manner seemed to change from that moment. After a bit



'I struck it by accident,' Ginger announced excitedly (page 151)

he went through to the back and a greasy-looking waiter came in. The boss must have spoken to him - it could hardly have been coincidence - for he brought the conversation round to food and asked me if I liked Borsch. He said they made a very good Ukranean Borsch. I said I could never get enough of it. Whereupon he said they served it as a speciality twice a week - Wednesday and Saturday.'

'Nice work,' complimented Biggles, 'Anything else?'

'Plenty. Whether or not it's the joint we're looking for the place is certainly a crooks'

hideout. After a bit the waiter came up close, gave me a leer, and fairly rocked me on my heels by asking me if I'd been followed. I said I didn't think so, but one never knew.

Whereupon he offered, for a hundred schillings, to show me another way out.'

'Did you accept?'

'Of course. It suited me to let him think I was on the run. Well, the upshot of it was he took me through a long bolthole which came out, of all places, the Mariahilf Strasse, where, had I wanted to do so, I could have dodged into thick traffic and given anybody following me the slip.

That's all.'

'Good show,' said Biggles warmly. 'This sounds like it. Note they served Borsch on Wednesday. Muller must have come over last Wednesday night.

That agrees with the date on the torn card. Wednesday must be one of the days the service operates -

assuming we haven't struck a false trail. To-morrow will be Saturday. Our next move will be to have some Borsch; in other words, book a passage to England. It'll cost a tidy penny, no doubt. But I reckoned on that, which is why I brought plenty of money, in dollars.'

Ginger looked startled. 'But you can't just walk into The Blue Goose and say, "Is this where you run a get-away service ? " '

'Why not?'

'They'd probably bump you off right away as a police spy.'

'I don't think so. Dead men can't talk, and they'd want to know how I knew about their racket.'

'What would you say to that?'

'I'd say a friend of mine named Hans Muller gave me the low-down.'

'What's to stop them knocking you on the head and taking your dollars anyway?'

'The promise of more dollars than I've got on me. But you can leave the answers to me.'

This is how we'll go to work. To-morrow I shall drift into The Blue Goose and ask if they know of an easy way of getting to England. Ginger, you'll loaf about that bolt-hole exit and watch for me to come out. Algy will be near you in a fast car. Your job is to watch where they take me - if you can. If you lose me, as you may, don't worry. Make for the airport, where Bertie will be standing by with the Proctor, and fly straight home. Tell Gaskin what's happened and ask him to contact the Security Police in Vienna. They'll deal with The Blue Goose. I want him, also, to watch our rooms in Mount Street. You'll see why later on - I hope. Now, if you two in the car see me get into an aircraft you'll go straight to the Security Police and tell them the whole story. They, no doubt, will grab the machine when it returns, and by cleaning up The Blue Goose wipe out the Vienna end of the racket. Is that clear ? '

'Clear enough, but you're taking a fearful risk,' answered Algy grimly.

'We're paid to take risks, and if we're going to jib at them we'd better resign,' returned Biggles shortly.

Algy nodded. 'Okay, if that's how you want it.'

It was just after seven the next evening when Biggles walked into The Blue Goose and seated himself at a small table covered with a stained paper cloth. Two other men, whom he naturally took to be customers, were already there, heads together, conversing in low tones with drinks between them. One was a big, hard-faced man, untidily dressed.

The other was a dark, dapper type, black hair brushed flat, neat to the point of being a little too slick. They spoke in English, but with such a drawl that Biggles took them to be Americans. Considering where they were, and the fact that they wore civilian clothes, he thought it not unlikely that they were deserters from the United States Forces of Occupation. Shortly after Biggles's arrival they got up and went out, one by the proper entrance and the other, the big man, to the rear.

The waiter, correctly described by Ginger as greasy, came in. He was as greasy in his manner as he was in his dress. With a menu card in his hand he approached Biggles's table.

'It's the night for Ukranean Borsch, I believe,' said Biggles casually, as he reached for the card.

The waiter's expression changed. 'You like it, eh?' 'I could do with some right away,'

Biggles told him. The waiter did not move. 'So,' he said quietly.

'So what?'

'The ticket.'

'Ticket ? ' Biggles, who was thinking fast, slowly tore the top off the card, although he was by no means sure he was doing the right thing. He could think of no other ticket. 'Is this the one you mean?' he asked, handing it over.

The waiter threw him a queer smile. 'Okay. Wait here,' he said, and

went out through the staff door.

During the next half hour Biggles was served with a fair meal, starting with Ukranean Borsch. He had a feeling that he was being watched, but gave no sign of it. One or two customers, all seedy-looking individuals, came and went. Then the waiter reappeared and beckoned. Biggles followed him to a back room, half office, half parlour, where, behind the desk, sat the big American he had seen in the dining-room. He was not particularly surprised.

'Sit down and relax,' said the man, his eyes on Biggles's face.

Biggles sat.

'Who told you about our Borsch?' was the first question.

'A man I know.'

'Name ? '

'I don't like names.'

'I do.'

'Okay. Muller. Hans Muller.'

'You a friend of his?'

'Does it matter ? '

'It matters plenty.'

'I know him, and what he does for a living.'

'You mean, what he did for a living.'

'I don't get it.'

'He's dead.'

'How did that happen?'

'He thought he was smart enough to get away with something and had an accident.'

Biggles lit a cigarette. 'Did he get what he came here for ? '

'Do you know what that was?'

'I've an idea. I get around, you know.'

'What's your idea ? '

'A piece of stuff called crystalium.'

'Right.'

'Did he get it ? '

'He did.'

'What's wrong with that ? '

'I organized the job. I brought him here. Paid him well. Took him home afterwards. He gave me what he came to get — he said. What he gave me, the cheap chiseller, was a piece of ordinary nickel worth about two cents.'

'You're not going to blame me because he pulled a fast one?'

'It's made me kinda nervous.'

'I can understand that.'

'What's your line ? '

'That's got nothing to do with it. I can pay for a lift to England.'

'In what ? '

'Dollars.'

'You'll need a lot.'

'How many ? '

'Three thousand.'

Biggles' eyebrows went up. 'That is a lot. I haven't that much on me.'

'What can you do ? '

'Fifteen hundred.' This was, in fact, as much as Biggles had on him.

'Nothing doing. I have a heavy pay roll, and planes don't run on water.'

'I could give you the rest over the other side, if that's any use to you.'

'That might be arranged. You'll remember what happened to Muller.'

'I'm remembering it. I'll put the money in your hand.' 'Not mine. I

don't go on these trips.

My agents in England will collect it - or else.'

'Fair enough. When do I travel ? '

'To-night if you want to.'

'The sooner the better.'

'I'll fix it. Now let's see the size of your wad.'

Biggles counted out fifteen hundred dollars, which left him very little.

The American put the money in a drawer. 'Now go back to the bar while I get things organized,' he ordered.

'I've a long distance call to make which may take time.'

Biggles went back to the restaurant and lingered over a pot of coffee for nearly an hour, at the end of which time the dark, slim man, whom he had seen with the other, came in. '

'We're all set,' he said briefly. 'Come on. This way.'

Biggles followed the man who by this time he suspected - correctly as it turned out - was to be his pilot. They went out by way of the bolt-hole described by Ginger. As he got into a waiting car he caught a glimpse of him on the pavement of the busy thoroughfare.

The drive that followed, through gathering darkness, was not as long as he expected it to be, occupying only about twenty minutes. They stopped at what was obviously a farm, and thereafter everything proceeded with the smooth efficiency of regular routine. In a large barn Biggles saw that his transport was to be an elderly Puss Moth. It was wheeled out, and within five minutes was in the air, heading

west.

'Beats me how you find your way in the dark,' said Biggles.

'I've done the trip so many times I could do it with my eyes shut,'
boasted the pilot.

A long, weary night flight followed. No intermediate landing was made, which told Biggles that the machine must have been specially adapted for its job, with extra fuel tanks; he did not remark on this to his pilot, however, for fear of betraying his own knowledge of aviation.

The moon was high in the sky by the time the English coast came into view. They crossed over East Anglia, and it was with no ordinary interest that Biggles watched to locate the position of the landing ground, for the pilot, of course, could not use any recognized airfield.

It turned out to be at another farm, on the outskirts of Newmarket Heath, in Cambridgeshire. A few sparse landing lights were put out, and the pilot landed with a confidence which Biggles had to admire. No sooner had he taxied up to the nearest building than two men set about the refuelling. As soon as this was done, the pilot, after a short talk on one side to his accomplices, took off again, to be lost to sight in the night sky. Biggles was then taken to the farmhouse where a car stood waiting.

'You're due fifteen hundred bucks,' said one of the men. 'Correct.'

'Where is it ? '

'In my lodging in London. I'll show you. Let's push on. I've had a busy day.'

It was in the early hours of the morning that the car pulled up outside Biggles's apartment in Mount Street. He let himself in with the latch-key, and closely followed by his companions, went on into the sitting-

room. Closing the door behind them he said loudly:

'Anyone at home ? '

The bedroom door was opened, and Inspector Gaskin, with two plain clothes men, entered.

'Go ahead, Inspector,' said Biggles. 'It's all yours.'

The two men spun round to bolt, but Biggles was standing with his back to the door, gun in his hand. 'Take it easy,' he said evenly. 'There's no hurry now.'

The rest is soon told. The fingerprints of one of the two men were those on the handle of the phone box door, and the handle of the knife that had killed Muller. Convicted of murder he paid the extreme penalty. His accomplice received a long prison sentence.

At the other end of the crooks' escape route a police raid cleaned up The Blue Goose just about the time Biggles was landing in England. Five

'wanted' men, deserters from the military forces in Austria, were found there. Security police, guided by Algy and Ginger, who had followed Biggles's car out of Vienna, were waiting for the Puss Moth when it landed at the end of its return trip.

So the case of the phone box murder was, as Bertie put it, all very neatly buttoned up, with a gang of unpleasant birds in the bag.

THE UNKNOWN DIAMONDS

Air-Commodore Raymond, head of the little-publicized Special Air Section at Scotland Yard, glanced up from his desk as Biggles walked in. 'Morning Bigglesworth,' he greeted briefly. 'Busy ? '

'Not particularly, sir.'

'I thought you might like to have a look at these.' The Air-Commodore mustered five small objects that lay on his blotter.

Biggles picked one of them up and held it to the light. He whistled softly. 'That's a nice line in millionaire stuff.'

The Air-Commodore nodded. 'That diamond you're holding is so perfect that it tells us from what part of the world it came. You'll only find stones of that quality at one place.'

Even as it is, uncut, it's superb.'

'How did this lot get here? Somebody try to import them without mentioning it at Customs ? '

'Since the Customs people have no record of them the answer must be yes.'

'You don't know how they were smuggled in ? '

'No. We wish we did. We suspect they're not the first to slip in under the curtain.'

Smuggling, as a fine art, knows no limits; for which reason the modern exponent is usually one jump ahead of the authorities — although given time we usually catch up.

Apart from being the tops in the matter of value, diamonds are so small that they're easily concealed and simple to transport. But sooner or later, as they have to be sold, somebody must see them, and it's then the cat slips out of the bag. The history of every sizeable diamond is known to those who deal in them honestly, so a diamond without a history is as crooked as the crook who handles it. Eventually word of it reaches us.'

'How did this little parcel of sparklers reach you ? '

'In a curious, roundabout way. The other day the police raided the premises of a small-time pawnbroker who has for a long time been suspected of dealing in stolen property.

The stuff was there all right. But these diamonds, which were in his safe, gave us a shock. We weren't expecting anything on that scale.'

'How did this fellow explain them?'

'His story is, he bought them. We couldn't shake him from that and it may be true. He swears he doesn't know the man from whom he bought them —

which may also be true.

In any case he wouldn't dare to squeal for fear of what the underworld might do to him when he comes out of prison. He's gone down for five years. Nothing was said about these diamonds at the trial, one reason being that as they had no history we couldn't prove they'd been stolen.

There's no law in this country against possessing diamonds. We had all the evidence we wanted for a conviction without them. The important thing about that is, the person who brought these diamonds into the country may not know they are now in the hands of the police.'

'He may try it again.'

'Exactly. Special men will be watching for them.' 'What's the official theory on the case ? '

'We believe these diamonds were smuggled in, and subsequently stolen by a professional burglar who sold them cheaply to the man in whose possession we found them. Only a cracksman would know that that particular pawnbroking business was a cover for receiving hot jewellery. The man from whom they were stolen wouldn't dare to report their loss, knowing that we would want to know how he got hold of them.'

'He's not likely to know you've got them.'

'He couldn't possibly know. All he knows is, they were taken by an unknown thief. He may wonder what has happened to them, but he'd have no means of finding out. That's to our advantage, because having outwitted the Customs people once he's almost certain to try the same trick again.

I may say that enquiries have revealed that America, France and Holland, have been worried by the sudden appearance of high-quality uncut stones; which suggests that the racket is being run on an international scale.'

'I take it that all efforts to trace these particular stones have failed.'

'Nothing is known of them in the legitimate trade. That's why we're holding them here.

Legally they belong to the pawnbroker, although he has no use for them where he is. We can't force him to say where they came from, even if he knows.'

'What's the next move ? '

The Air-Commodore sat back in his chair. Now look, Bigglesworth. There's more to this than mere smuggling. Diamonds, like gold, help to stabilize the economy of every civilized country. Any quantity of uncontrolled stones would lower the price of honest diamonds in the world markets.

That in turn would upset the value of those held as security for loans by banks and business houses. The consequences of a slump would be serious.

It has nearly happened more than once and there's obviously a risk of it happening now.'

'But if, as you say, you know where these sparklers started from, it shouldn't be difficult to stop the leak at that end.'

'It may be more difficult than you suppose. These particular specimens came from South-West Africa. The experts who have seen them are agreed on that. The most valuable diamond field in the world is Alexander Bay, at the mouth of the Orange River.

The stones are not born there, as you might say. They have been washed down by flood water through ages of time. Where they started from no man knows. Be sure plenty have tried to find out. Many have lost their lives in the attempt, for the upper river flows through some of the worst country in the world - much of it barren, waterless waste, or a chaos of rock and sand.' The Air-Commodore pushed the cigarette box forward, and continued.

Now because South Africa stands to lose more than any other country in the event of a slump in diamonds, its government has taken the most elaborate precautions to prevent that from happening. Places that are known to hold diamondiferous gravel are closed territory. Prospecting for diamonds is forbidden by law, and anyone found in those areas is liable to be arrested and convicted as a diamond poacher. It is a crime to be found in possession of an uncut diamond. The actual diamond fields are protected by patrols, fences, searchlights, and so on; but in spite of all this, because it isn't practicable to watch thousands of square miles of country all the time, a few stones do leak out. The authorities know that, but the leakage isn't regarded as serious. Anyway, it can't be stopped. The Hottentots and Bushmen who manage to exist in these regions know the value of diamonds. Some of them also know where stones can be found — and take care to keep it a secret. The temptation to buy these stones is great, and there are white men willing to take the risk. But this leakage is only a trickle. Of course, the law about dealing in uncut diamonds doesn't apply outside South Africa, so the real problem of the illicit buyer is how to get them out of the prohibited area. After that he's safe, provided he doesn't try to smuggle them into countries where duty is payable. Apparently that's being done — as these stones on the table bear witness.'

Biggles lit a cigarette. 'Where do I come into this? Is there reason for thinking that aircraft come into the picture?'

'Yes, but it's only surmise, based on the fact that control in South Africa has been so tightened, both by land and sea patrols, that it's hard to see how any form of surface craft could get through.'

'What would you like me to do about it ? '

'Well, as it's impossible to trace the diamonds from this end, I thought if you weren't busy you might run down to South Africa, very quietly, to see if there's a clue to be picked up at that end. If there are traces of aircraft operating in the district you should be able to spot them.'

'But surely if an aircraft was being used it must have been seen by someone?'

'By whom? Hottentots? Bushmen? White men are few and far between in the Kalahari Desert and the deadly Kaokovelt. Anyway, who takes any notice of an aeroplane these days? There are regular transcontinental services, of course, but you can ignore those.'

'What about private services ? '

'There's only one what you might call private owner in the district, registered for business purposes. You needn't worry about him. He was there long before this question arose. No doubt the police vetted him pretty thoroughly when he applied for his licence. They're satisfied he's all right — not that he could be otherwise, considering where he lives.'

'Where's that?'

'In the bad country north of the Orange River. That's why he uses a plane.'

'Who is he? I may meet him.'

'A German doctor named Shultz.'

'What's his line of business ? '

'Collecting monkeys. The country round him swarms with them.'

Biggles stared. 'What on earth does he want monkeys for ? '

'He exports them.'

'But who wants all these monkeys ? '

'You'd be surprised. Originally Shultz used to supply zoos all over the world — trapping them or buying them from natives. Now they are in demand for medical research.

America buys them in hundreds for tests in connection with radio-activity. It seems that monkeys suffer from seasickness so Shultz flies them, or has them flown, to a place in Algeria which he maintains for the purpose. From there they are distributed to whoever wants them. Don't look startled. Our own airways have often carried cargoes of monkeys.'

'I'd hate to fly a load.'

'They're sealed off in small compartments and the pilot is protected by a screen of wire netting in case they should get loose.'

'I should jolly well think so. People certainly choose some queer occupations. Fancy being a monkey-monger ! ' Biggles got up. 'All right, sir. I'll waffle along with my lads and see if I can make anything of it.

If all else fails I may collect a few diamonds myself and retire on the proceeds.'

The Air-Commodore smiled. 'Good idea - as long as you don't get caught.

It might be less dangerous to bring home a load of monkeys.'

Biggles grinned. 'Come to think of it I might bring both. After all, if planes can carry monkeys I don't see why monkeys shouldn't carry

diamonds. See you later, sir.'

For a week the old Air Police Halifax - which may have seen more service than any aircraft of its type - had kicked the air behind it over those harsh, unlovely areas of South-West Africa, which, by a whim of nature, yield the earth's most exquisite jewels.

As Ginger once remarked, as he looked down on the almost lifeless wilderness that lies between the Kumene River and Cape Cross, it was as if nature had devised a scheme deliberately to lure men to their doom.

For if this sun-scorched strip of sand and rock, known as the Kaokovelt, holds diamonds, it also holds the bones of many of those who risked their lives to find them.

So far, the only incident to mark the monotony of a quest that was fast becoming wearisome, had occurred when the Halifax had been shadowed by a South African Police patrol. It had followed them to Kleetmanshoop airfield, where Biggles had satisfied the officer in charge by producing papers which showed that he was on an official flight of survey, mapping a projected new route to the Cape.

This subterfuge had been arranged by Air-Commodore Raymond to cover the real purpose of the expedition. It had served its purpose admirably, facilitating maintenance at the several airfields on which the Halifax had landed. Biggles had supported the papers he carried by not staying more than two days at any one place, using in turn the aerodromes from Windhoek in the north to Uperton in the south. To the east and west of this line lay most of the territory under inspection, the Namib Desert running as far as the sea to the west, and the notorious Kalahari to the east.

It must be made clear that Biggles was concerned primarily with the possible air aspect of the case, and that in so far as the illicit diamonds were evading Customs duties, not only in Britain but in the other countries that contributed to Interpol (the International Police Commission) of which he was British Air Representative. What he hoped to do was pick up the trail that ran from South-West Africa to Europe. That such a trail existed was proved by the gems which,

almost by a fluke, had fallen into the hands of Scotland Yard.

He did not expect to have the luck of spotting the culprit aircraft, should one in fact exist, in the air. What he was actually doing was looking for an aircraft on the ground, or indications that one had landed; for landing wheels can leave tracks, on otherwise unmarked ground, that may persist for years, although they may not be visible from ground level. Apart from that there might be empty oil drums, fuel containers and the like.

This was not such a hopeless task as it might appear, for although there were hundreds of thousands of square miles to cover it was only necessary to search the level areas on which it was possible for an aircraft to land. Mountains, rock country, and swamp, such as the vast Etosha Pan, could be ignored. However, there was nothing to show for a week's hard work. And hard work it was. The aircraft rocked in the superheated, rarified air, and there was no question of flying 'hands off.' Keeping the machine on even keel was sometimes a matter of physical strength.

Aside from that there was the nervous strain of knowing that in the event of engine or structural failure, forcing an emergency landing, there would be little hope of rescue. Biggles, who had Ginger, Algy and Bertie with him, lightened the labour by allowing everyone in turn to have a day off.

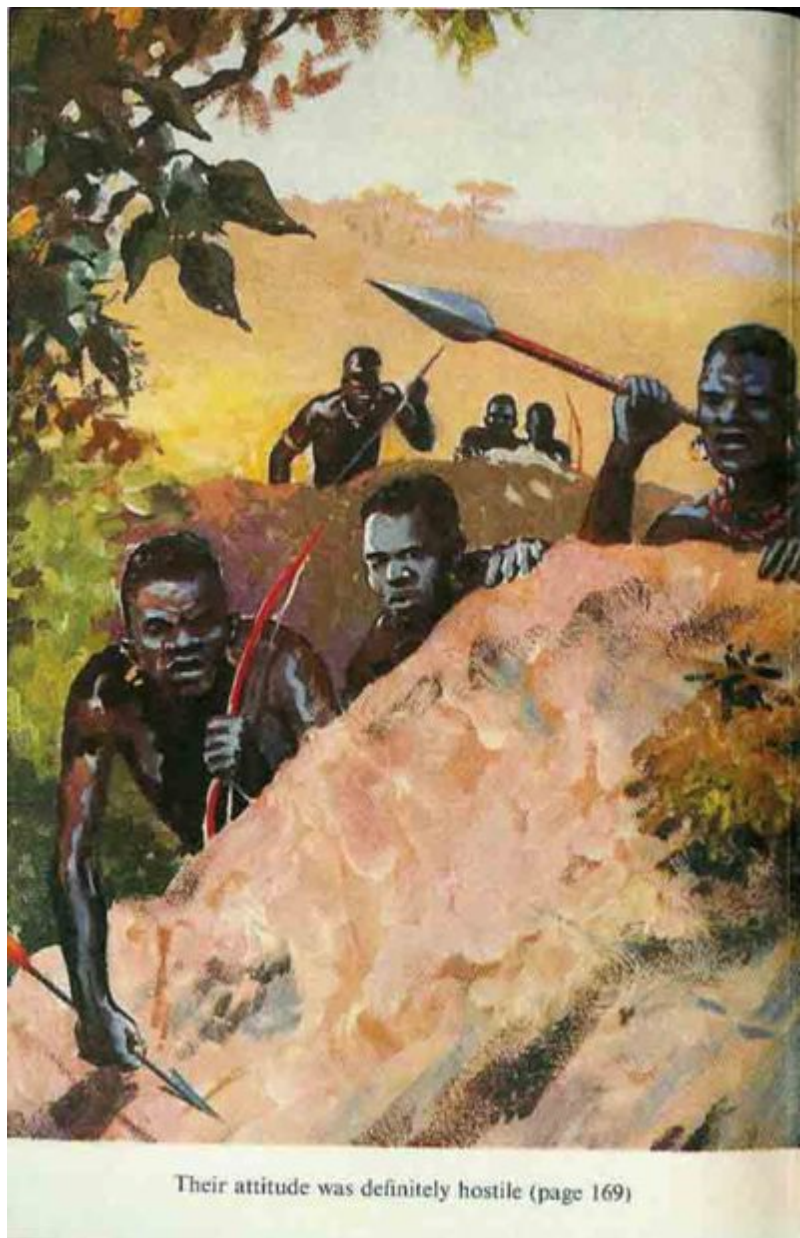
So far they had not called on Shultz, the monkey man, whose place happened to be in a corner of the Kalahari Desert which had not yet been covered.

It was on the eighth day that they saw their first Bushmen, those small primitive natives who, retreating before the tide of civilization, have learned how to exist in conditions which no other race could endure. What happened was this. Biggles, with his full crew on board, was reconnoitring the area north-east of the Grosse Karas mountains, perhaps twenty miles from Shultz's zoological establishment. As a matter of detail it had been Ginger's day off, but he had decided to come to see the monkeys in case Biggles should call on the doctor, although this was not on the schedule. The heat-haze was bad, and Biggles was fighting his way low through the bumps, when in a wide stretch of flat country something was observed that could not be identified from the air. There were four objects, close together, all the

same size; and from the perfectly square shadows which they cast it seemed impossible that they could be rocks. Biggles made two low runs over them, and all in the aircraft were agreed that the objects were, or had been, containers of some sort. To settle any doubt about it Biggles took a chance, landed, and taxied up to them. They all got out and the question was answered.

The objects were what have become known as jerry-cans, those excellent petrol containers used by the German forces in the war. Biggles picked one of them up. 'It's full!' he exclaimed, in a voice of astonishment.

They were standing there discussing the mystery, for there were no wheel marks or anything else to show how the cans had got there, when from a bush-covered hole in the ground - which Biggles had taken care to avoid thinking it was a dead bush - appeared six undersized, wizened, brown



Their attitude was definitely hostile (page 169)

men, whose only garment was a small skin apron. They carried miniature bows and arrows, and spears, and their attitude was definitely hostile.

'Bushmen,' murmured Biggles. 'Watch your step. They poison their arrows.'

He replaced the can he had picked up, and as the natives advanced threateningly, held out his hands to show that he was unarmed.

Conversation was not possible, of course, for none of them knew the Bushman language, so all they could do was try to indicate by signs that they did not want the cans; for the little men were making it clear that the cans were theirs.

'Let's get airborne, old boy,' advised Bertie. 'I've no argument with poisoned bodkins, no, by Jove!'

'Just a minute,' answered Biggles. 'We must try to get to the bottom of this.' Facing the Bushmen, who had stopped a few yards away, he pointed to his mouth as if he were thirsty.

Upon this the natives went into a huddle and did some uncouth chattering.

At the end, a decision apparently having been reached, one of them produced a half-gourd and, opening a can with a dexterity which revealed that this was not the first time, he poured out about a tablespoonful of liquid.

Biggles took the cup, sipped the fluid cautiously, then drank it.

'Water,' he told the others, smiling as he handed back the cup. 'Sweet water, too, although somewhat tepid.'

That still doesn't explain how that particular type of can got here.'

'Since we can't ask these lads we shall have to go on guessing,' Algy pointed out.

Biggles produced his cigarette case and gave a smoke to each of the natives. The cigarettes were accepted, but without enthusiasm. The Bushmen obviously knew what they were, for one of them produced a pipe into which he pushed his cigarette, paper as well. Another took a tin box from a skin bag slung on his girdle; and Ginger saw with surprise that the box was already nearly full of tobacco.

Nothing could be said. Nothing more could be done, so with a final smile and a wave Biggles walked back to the aircraft. He did not go at once to the cockpit but waited for the others to join him. Then he said: 'I don't know about you but I found that all very interesting. To start with, these chaps have jerry-cans, and while they may be common enough in North Africa there can't be many in these parts. The water in them is good water, not the sort you'd expect to find in the possession of men who spend half their time sucking moisture out of the sand through hollow reeds. And they've plenty of it.

They've tobacco - good tobacco, too; not that hard-baked trade stuff.

One, at least, has a brand new pipe. Two can sport new jackknives. One, you may have noticed, had a couple of curtain rings in his hair. Where did they get these things? You don't find 'em kicking about in the wilderness.'

'They've obviously been in touch with a white man,' answered Algy.

'Obviously is the word,' agreed Biggles. 'Who was it ? ' 'Since Shultz lives no great distance away he's most likely to be the Santa Claus.'

'Correct again. Why does he dish out this sort of stuff to the Bushmen?

There are several thousands of them in the Kalahari, and if Shultz made a practice of giving things away the word would go round and he'd be inundated with visitors. Or put it this way. What possible service could the Bushmen give Shultz to earn things which to them must be treasures -

things which they couldn't otherwise obtain ? '

'They could help him to catch monkeys,' suggested Ginger.

'Could be. But where are the monkeys? Have you seen any trotting around on these blistering sands? No. Monkeys have more sense than to live in this sort of country. You'll find them in the ravines and

gorges of the mountains, where there's food, water, and shade. I may be wrong, but there's something about Bushmen and monkeys that doesn't quite fit.'

'I see what you mean,' said Algy slowly. 'We've seen the Bushmen. It might be a good idea to drift along and see the monkeys.'

'Precisely,' returned Biggles, drily.

Murmured Bertie: 'As they say in the newspapers at home, the police are anxious to interview Mr. Shultz, who they think might be able to assist them in their enquiries.'

'The first thing is to find the gentleman,' averred Biggles. 'Let's get mobile.'

There was no difficulty in locating Dr. Shultz's establishment, for in a district where a real house was a phenomenon the few that did brave the wastes were as conspicuous as bees on a whitewashed ceiling. Moreover, the monkey merchant's home was no rude shack; it was a substantial bungalow with extensive out-buildings, and, what was even more remarkable, a garden — or at any rate, a patch of cultivated ground.

The site explained this apparent miracle, for it nestled in an elbow of a valley that must have drained the rugged hills on either side, thus providing the one thing without which the enterprise would not have been possible. The valley, in comparison with the brown desert into which it fell, was green, and anything green in a land of parched sterility speaks eloquently of water.

Wheel marks in the sand beyond the herbage also told a story, although no vehicle was in view. The marks, it could be noted, converged on a wood-and-corrugated-iron building large enough to accommodate an aircraft.

Some half a dozen Hottentots who were moving about stopped work to stare.

Biggles landed along the tracks, taxied on to as near the bungalow as was seemly, and switched off.

By the time those in the machine were on the ground two white men were walking towards them. One was an elderly, good-looking man of perhaps fifty years of age, presumably the doctor; for his companion, a flaxen-haired fellow in the early twenties, was clearly too young to have been in the business for the length of time that Shultz was known to have been there.

'Doctor Shultz ? ' queried Biggles, as the two parties met. The older man bowed slightly. '

At your service,' said he, speaking, as was to be expected, with an accent.

Biggles introduced himself and his crew, omitting to mention their police ranks. 'We're in the district on government business, and seeing this oasis in the wilderness decided to look you up,' he explained. 'We knew you lived somewhere near our course.'

'How did you know ? ' questioned Shultz, quietly.

'When one's line of flight is over this sort of country one naturally checks up on all available landing fields, in case of trouble,' answered Biggles readily. 'You have an aircraft, I believe.'

'Yes. I use one for my business,' confirmed the doctor. 'This is my pilot, Herr Leffers. As you will believe, we seldom have visitors, so those who do call are all the more welcome.'

Come in, and allow me to offer such hospitality as my house is able to provide.'

The airmen followed their host to the bungalow — Ginger, it must be admitted, conscious of a feeling of anti-climax. Although he had not formed a mental picture of Doctor Shultz he had imagined that only a

'tough' type would choose to banish himself in a place as remote and uncomfortable as the Kalahari Desert. The doctor was obviously a man of culture, and the charm that so often goes with education.

A good deal of noise coming from the long hut Ginger recognized as the chattering of monkeys.

Presently the doctor mentioned it. 'You know what my business is, I suppose ? ' he asked, with a smile.

Replied Biggles, also smiling: 'If I hadn't been told I could guess.'

The doctor showed them into a comfortably furnished room, decorated with trophies of big game. Antelope horns bristled from the walls and lion and leopard skins served as floor coverings.

Over lunch the conversation turned, not unnaturally, to the doctor's unusual occupation.

He was willing to talk of it, and how it had come about. Until the war, he said, he had for some time been engaged in experimental work on monkey gland in connexion with the human body. This was, of course, stopped by the war, when monkeys became unobtainable in Germany. Afterwards, in order to complete his work he had set up a laboratory and surgery where monkeys could easily and cheaply be acquired — where they were at the moment. Finding that there was a steady demand for monkeys by zoological gardens and medical institutions engaged in the same work as himself, he had started to supply the market through the ordinary channels. Then came the atom bomb.

The demand for monkeys, for research into the effects of radio-activity, soared, America alone being prepared to take five hundred a week. He alone could not supply that number, although to save time, and losses in transit by sea routes, he now employed air transportation. In short, monkeys had become more profitable than medicine. Doctor Shultz said all this so frankly that Ginger did not doubt the truth of it.

The doctor went on to say that he did not catch the monkeys himself.

They were brought to him by Hottentots who knew what he was doing and were experts at catching them.

Several species were brought in. He took them all, paying the natives in cash or goods, as they wished. However, now that the post-war troubles of Germany were being settled he was thinking of packing up and returning home in the near future.

Asked about his flying arrangements he said that his machine was a converted war-time Dornier, fitted with cages to carry sixty monkeys at a load. The Dornier took them to his depot near Algiers, from where they were forwarded on the regular air services. He had a load ready to go now. Leffers would be flying north the following day.

'Do the Kalahari Bushmen ever trouble you at all ? ' asked Biggles. 'I'm told they can be difficult.'

The doctor shook his head. 'No. They never come near here. They have no reason to.

Would you like to see my monkeys? We shall soon have to be loading them up, if Leffers is to get away at dawn.'

Biggles said they would, so they went to the big shed, which turned out to be not only a hangar but a menagerie. The inside walls were fitted with cages, all full of monkeys. One or two larger species were secured by light chains to benches. Biggles stopped in front of one of these, a grey-faced beast with a long tail. With a bandage round its shoulders it was looking pathetically sorry for itself. Like the others, it wore a label round its neck.

'What's the matter with him ? ' asked Biggles.

'The silly fellow cut himself trying to escape, but he's all right now,' explained the doctor casually. 'I've been to some trouble over him as you see. The grey-faces are hardier than most, and fetch the highest price.'

He walked on.

Biggles put out a hand and stroked the creature, whereupon it turned on him with a snarl and nearly got him.

The doctor turned sharply. 'That was foolish of you,' he admonished seriously. 'These are wild animals, not pets. You might have been bitten.'

A monkey can inflict a nasty wound.'

'Sorry,' said Biggles contritely. 'Stupid of me. May I buy this poor chap? I've taken a fancy to him.'

'Afraid not. He's already sold,' said the doctor apologetically.

They did not stay long after that. Doctor Shultz hinted that he and Leffers would have to start loading the plane, so the airmen took their leave. Shultz saw them to the aircraft.

Biggles thanked him for his hospitality, took off, flew to Windhoek, and arranged for the tanks to be topped up forthwith.

The others looked surprised. 'What's the hurry ? ' asked Ginger.

'I'm going straight on.'

'On. Where?'

'Home - calling at Algiers on the way. I want to get there before Leffers. We've finished here, anyway, except for sending a cable to Marcel Brissac of the French Surete, asking him to meet us at Algiers.'

Ginger stared. 'You don't mean - you think - Shultz has anything to do with the diamond racket ? '

'I'm pretty sure of it. I'm hoping to confirm it.'

'If ever a man struck me as behaving innocent, it was Shultz,' declared Algy.

'It's time you knew that's often the case,' averred Biggles drily.

'Who carries the stones - Leffers ? '

'Not likely. That wouldn't work. Sometimes even pilots are searched.'

'Who, then ? '

'That grey-faced monkey. Who would search a monkey?' Biggles chuckled.

'Watch the Air Commodore's face when I tell him.'

'But hold hard, old boy, what gave you that idea? 'put in Bertie. 'I mean to say, are you guessing - shooting arrows in the dark, and all that ? '

Biggles lit a cigarette and became serious. 'In the first place Shultz said the Bushmen never came near him. That was a lie. Those we saw in the desert had been there. In the house I saw a box of pipes, knives and trinkets, identical with those the Bushmen had.

Not knowing that we had seen those fellows there was no need for Shultz to hide the stuff. Why did he lie? I'd say because the Bushmen are bringing him diamonds, and he'd rather not be associated with them. I've no doubt about the monkey-business being genuine; but it's not as profitable as diamonds; so if Shultz wants to retire, as I can well believe, diamonds might offer a short cut to affluence in the Fatherland.'

'But where does the grey-face come in?' demanded Ginger.

'You heard me try to buy it. He wouldn't sell. Why not? My money is as good as anybody else's. I knew he wouldn't sell - at least, I'd have looked silly if he had.'

'I've got it,' cried Ginger. 'The stones are in the bandages.'

'That's what I suspected, but I was wrong. Why do you suppose I risked being bitten by stroking the beast? When that monkey reaches the man in England whose name and address were on the label round its neck, I fancy it won't be wearing bandages. There won't be any need.'

'Why ? '

'Because the wound behind its shoulder is practically healed.'

'The wound it made when it tried to escape ? '

'No. Escape nothing. The wound Doctor Shultz made when he operated on it and slipped the diamonds under its skin. If what I felt weren't diamonds then that monkey has got a nasty row of boils on the way. But let's get cracking. We've a long way to go.'

Two days later, when, at nine o'clock in the morning, the Halifax landed on the big international airport at Algiers, Marcel Brissac, Biggles's opposite number in France, was there to meet it. He was in civilian clothes.

'What cooks, old cabbage ? ' he demanded.

'Let's find a seat where we can have some coffee and watch the landing ground at the same time,' answered Biggles. 'I'll tell you all about it.'

Which he did. 'Apart from deciding that you ought to know what's going on, in case diamonds are being unloaded in Paris, I need your help,' he went on. 'This pilot, Leffers, knows us by sight, and if he sees

us here he may suspect he's being watched and change his plans. He should be along any minute now. That's where you come in. When he lands, I want you to keep an eye on the monkeys and check what happens to them. You can pose as an airport official. In particular, keep an eye on the lad with a grey face and a long tail. According to his label he's booked for London, but I want to make sure it hasn't been changed. I don't care much what happens to the rest. Do what you like about that, but I suggest you watch for grey-faces consigned to any address in France. There's the Dornier coming in now. Get busy.'

'Zut! What an affaire!' muttered Marcel, as he went off. 'Wait for me here.'

The others watched him stroll over to the aircraft, now taxi-ing on to the concrete apron.

They saw a covered van drive up to it, watched the monkeys transferred to it, watched it drive off. The airport trolley took a case to the luggage hall, but they dared not go near it because Leffers remained with it.

It was some time before Marcel returned. Biggles occupied the period by composing a cable to the Air-Commodore.

When Marcel breezed in he was smiling. 'All goes well,' he reported. 'All the little beasts except grey-face go to the depot. You see the van, I think. Grey-face goes forward on the next Air France plane to London, in one hour. He wears a label to a man named Shultz, to be collected at London Airport.'

'Good,' said Biggles, getting up. 'Where does the London plane stop en route ? '

'Marseilles and Paris.'

'Even so, as it's faster than we are we'd better push along if we want to get in first. I think, Marcel, you ought to travel on that plane as far as Paris, to make sure there's no trick - see that grey-face isn't dropped off on the way. Should that happen it's your affair; otherwise let the animal go on to London.'

'As I must return to Paris I go on that plane in any case,' asserted Marcel.

'You might send this cable for me, priority,' requested Biggles. 'It's to Raymond at the Yard.'

Certainernent.'

'That's all. We'll press on. Thanks, Marcel.'

'Au revoir. Bon voyage.'

On the way to the machine Ginger raised a question. 'What about quarantine? I mean, can this fellow Shultz just roll up and collect grey-face? I know about dogs, but what about other animals ? '

'I don't think Shultz would have any difficulty in collecting the beast right away,' replied Biggles. 'In any case it would be safe at the airport. Now that nearly as many animals as humans travel by air they have their own waiting room; magnificent place, in the charge of the R.S.P.C.A. It's chiefly for animals in transit. Apart from that, zoos and research places are reckoned to be quarantine stations in themselves.'

They walked on, and in a few minutes were in the air, London bound.

They were met at the airport by quite a number of people. The Air Commodore was there, as was Inspector Gaskin, a plain clothes man and a police surgeon, all from the Yard. Also present was the senior officer of Customs and Excise and a representative of the R.S.P.C.A.

'I got your cable,' announced the Air Commodore. 'What on earth is all this about ? '

'Quite simple, sir,' answered Biggles. 'I'm expecting a parcel of diamonds to arrive on the Paris plane, due in in about twenty minutes.'

'But why the deuce did you ask for a surgeon ? ' 'Because without him they might be hard to get at.' 'Have you seen these diamonds ? '

'No. But I think I know where they are.'

'And where's that ? '

'Inside the skin of a monkey. As I'm no use at surgery I thought we'd better have a doctor on the job.'

The Air Commodore stared. 'Why didn't you grab this monkey ? '

Biggles smiled faintly. 'I thought it better to grab the man who comes to collect it. After all, the wretched monkey doesn't know what it's doing.'

Moreover, there's a snag. If we let the man collect the monkey we may never see it again, or the diamonds, because I imagine he'll lose no time in killing the poor beast to get the stones. On the other hand, if we operate on the monkey here, and collect the stones, the man could swear that he knew nothing about the gems.'

'I see your point,' said the Air Commodore, slowly. 'I'm taking no chances of losing sight of this animal. If our doctor and the Cruelty to Animals Inspector agree, we'll examine it here, in the animal house. To whom is it consigned ? '

'A man named Shultz, probably a relation of the man of the same name who runs the monkey business in South Africa. That's where the animal started. I saw it there.'

Àh! ' breathed the Air Commodore. 'Now I see daylight.'

The plain clothes man, who had been away, returned to say that a gentleman with a car was waiting to collect a monkey.

'We'll let him collect it, and then see what he has to say about it,' stated the Air Commodore grimly. 'Here's the Paris plane being brought in now. Leave the talking to me.'

The big machine landed. The passengers got out and filed into the Customs Hall. The luggage was unloaded. One large wooden box was put on one side.

A man appeared and stood by it. The Air Commodore and his party joined him.

Said the Air Commodore, politely: 'Excuse me, but is this monkey consigned to you ? '

'Yes.'

'Did you want to take it away immediately ? '

'Yes.'

'I'm sorry, but you can't do that. It will first have to be examined for infectious disease. I have a doctor here.'

'But I've never had any trouble before,' protested the man.

'Oh! So you've received monkeys before ? '

'Often.'

'From where?'

'South Africa. My brother sends them to me.'

‘Ah well, this shouldn't take long,’ said the Air Commodore casually, signing to some porters to take the case to the animal building. ‘Come with us if you wish,’ he invited.

In a few minutes the party was inside. The doctor, after putting a cloth over the monkey's head, lifted it from its case and ran his hands over it. ‘Hello ! ’ he exclaimed, ‘what are these lumps ? ’

‘Lumps,’ echoed Shultz.

‘I'm afraid we shall have to see what they are,’ said the police surgeon.

‘I brought an anaesthetic.’

Shultz, who had been backing towards the door, found his way barred by the portly form of Inspector Gaskin.

The Air Commodore's tone changed. ‘I must tell you that I am a police-officer, and have reason to believe that this animal is being used to introduce precious stones into the country without a Customs declaration.

Have you anything to say to that? We shall soon know the truth.’

Shultz drew a deep breath. He shrugged. ‘I might as well own up. The monkey is carrying diamonds. How did you know ? ’

‘Have you had a burglar in your house lately ? ’ ‘Yes.’

‘Then you have him to thank for spoiling a neat, but nevertheless unpardonable, scheme.’

‘Shall I remove the diamonds ? ’ asked the surgeon. ‘I think you'd better,’ the Air Commodore told him.

The end of this ingenious attempt to evade Customs duties can be imagined. Shultz - the one in England - wisely chose to make a clean

breast of the business, from which it appeared that there were extenuating circumstances, although these did not altogether save him. He said that his brother in Africa was a genuine research worker, and it was only recently that he had succumbed to the temptation to buy, for a mere song, the diamonds that were sometimes found by the Bushmen in the Kalahari Desert. He did not keep the money thus made, but handed it to a charitable institution in Germany devoted to the care of war-mutilated German soldiers. This was confirmed. He appeared in court the day following his arrest and was ordered to pay a heavy fine. This, taking into account that he had lost the diamonds, was considered a sufficient punishment.

His brother, in South Africa, was lucky, for had he fallen into the hands of the South African Police it would have fared badly with him. Whether he, or Leffers, became suspicious and took fright, or whether his brother sent a message that reached him before the police, was not known; but by the time the police arrived, he had gone, and neither he nor Leffers were seen again. It can be presumed that they fled to Germany in the Dornier, for which reason the monkeys in the district, although they were not to know it, have cause to be grateful to Biggles.

To-day, if you go to the Zoo, and happen to notice a grey-faced monkey with a long tail giving himself airs, it may be because he is the only one of his tribe ever to have carried a fortune in diamonds and lived to tell a tale of a real piece of 'monkey business.'

Document Outline

01 plain Page 1

Page 2

Page 3

Page 4

Page 5

Page 6

Page 7

Page 8

Page 9

Page 10

Page 11

Page 12

Page 13

Page 14

Page 15

Page 16

Page 17

Page 18

Page 19

Page 20

Page 21

Page 22

Page 23

Page 24

Page 25

Page 26

Page 27

Page 28

Page 29

Page 30

Page 31

Page 32

Page 33

Page 34

Page 35

Page 36

02 plain Page 1

Page 2

Page 3

Page 4

Page 5

Page 6

Page 7

Page 8

Page 9

Page 10

Page 11

Page 12

Page 13

Page 14

03 plain Page 1

Page 2

Page 3

Page 4

Page 5

Page 6

Page 7

Page 8

Page 9

Page 10

Page 11

Page 12

Page 13

Page 14

Page 15

Page 16

Page 17

Page 18

Page 19

Page 20

Page 21

Page 22

Page 23

Page 24

Page 25

Page 26

Page 27

Page 28

Page 29

Page 30

Page 31

Page 32

Page 33

Page 34

Page 35

Page 36

Page 37

Page 38

Page 39

Page 40

Page 41

Page 42

Page 43

Page 44

Page 45